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Chutima Pragatwutisarn
Iowa State University

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The mystical journey in Sylvia Plath's poetry

by

Chutima Pragatwutisarn

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CHAPTER ONE: CRITICAL RECEPTION

Criticism of Plath and her poetry, though various and often conflicting, may be divided into three major groups: confessional, mythical, and feminist. These three modes of analysis accordingly generate the three images of Plath as a confessional poet, a mythical figure, and a pioneer of the feminist movement. The critics selected for review here represent the categories mentioned above, and their critical assessments help formulate assumptions and suggest new areas of exploration of Plath and her poetry.

Mary Kinzie says in her review of critical essays on Sylvia Plath that Plath "did not become a 'confessional poet' until she committed suicide" (289). The manner of the poet's death, Kinzie suggests, seems to dissolve boundaries between art and life. Many critics consequently find it irresistible and somehow inevitable to incorporate the poet's life in their consideration of her work. The temptation is also noted by Linda W.

Wagner:

After Plath's suicide the second stage of criticism of her work began immediately...For a young woman to kill herself at the beginning of a successful writing career posed an intriguing--and frightening--mystery. All kinds of equations between art and life began to be suggested...Controversy was rampant, and criticism of Plath's work would never again be untouched by biography. (1)

The definition of Plath as a "confessional poet" poses a critical problem when critics tend to regard her work as a substitute for her life story. Hence, Lynda K. Bundtzen notes, "Despite the lavish attention Plath initially

received after her death, there was very little actual interpretation. The rubric 'confessional' often substitutes for detailed examination of the poems" (1). Plath's case is further complicated by the fact that many critics diagnose events of her life and the manner of her death as "sick," "morbid," and "pathological." Once they believe that the poet "erased the boundaries between art and experience," it is not worth considering her work because "her aesthetic, after all, is nothing more than the chronicle for a nervous breakdown" (Kinzie 290).

Irving Howe's "The Plath's Celebration: A Partial Dissent" begins with his assumption that Plath is a "confessional poet" who falls short of a "confessional" standard. Although Plath is praised by Howe for her "gift for a single isolate image" in such poems as "Lady Lazarus" and "Cut," she often yields to confessional "temptation to reveal all while one eye measures the effect of the revelation" (10). Howe notes that when Plath fails to write within the "confessional" standard, the outcome is even worse. "A confessional poetry," Howe argues, "would seem to be the one in which the poet speaks to the reader without the mediating presence of imagined event or *persona*, something about his life" (12-13). However, most poems in Ariel show that the poet has abandoned her sense of audience:

She writes with a hallucinatory, self-contained fervor. She addresses herself to the air, to the walls...There is something utterly monolithic, fixated about the voice that emerges in these poems, a voice unmodulate and asocial. (13)

Considering the poet's fervor and frenzy, power and pathology, Howe questions the nature and value of her vision. Plath's poems, says Howe,

simply generate dangerous effects of "sickness" and "despair" to her "young readers" (5).

In Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness, Edward Butscher attempts to explain Plath's vision from a psychological perspective. Butscher argues that the artist, unlike a 'normal' adult, still retains his world of fantastic illusions. The artist's "escapism" or "method" allows him to create his "vision" or "madness" (xii). The artist consequently assumes the role of God: "history is his biography, religion and religious ritual his myth of self and craft, and the cosmos itself a mere extension of his own conscious and unconscious perceptions" (xii).

Though Plath's vision is psychologically explained by Butscher, its artistic value is still questionable since Butscher agrees with Howe that Plath's work does not transcend her life. According to Butscher, Plath is "consciously dedicated to fusing biography with poetry" so that the relation between art and life "can no longer be split asunder or seriously challenged" (xi). In his analysis of Plath's poetry, Butscher always keeps her life in the foreground, making the interpretation seem almost impossible without the study of the poet's biography. Plath's "Kindness," Butscher claims, "poses the situation of Ted's act of treachery against her and the children. Here she utilizes the radio play about the man who ran over the rabbit and then sold the carcass to buy his wife two roses as a central motif" (361). Such interpretation, solely dependent on biographical details, seems to be exclusively meaningful to the poet and thereby reduces the artistic and universal values we expect from the work of art.

Judith Kroll's Chapters in a Mythology diverges from critics' tendency to see Plath as a "confessional poet." An analysis of poetry, Kroll argues, must be done "in its own terms" if we are "[t]o approach [Plath] as a poet rather than to use her as an image of the poet" (1). Rejecting the "confessional surface," Kroll asserts that Plath mythologizes her life and that her poetry, a record of mythologized biography, is "chapters in a mythology." Kroll uses the structure of myth to defend the poet's vision against pathological accusations made by the earlier critics. According to Kroll, the failure to consider the more impersonal or mythic dimensions of Plath's poetry causes the reader "to regard [her] suffering and death as morbid rather than to understand her fascination with death as connected with and transformed into a broader concern with the theme of rebirth and transcendence" (5).

Kroll reads Plath's poetry as predestined by the myth of the White Goddess. Two mythical structures, according to Kroll, underlie Plath's work: "two male rivals contending for the favor of a Muse-goddess" and "two female rivals [contending] for the favor of a god" (64). The protagonist in Plath's work then performs in the present what has already occurred in the mythic past. Lynda K. Bundtzen astutely argues that Kroll's using the "patriarchal" myth to reinscribe the protagonist's role as a White Goddess seems contradictory to Plath's desire in her late poems to break away from her dependence on men (9). Kroll also senses the problem of her mythical paradigm since she changes her direction toward "a religious conversion theory" in her analysis of Plath's final poems. "Instead of the White Goddess," says Bundtzen, "Kroll ends with a view of Plath as a mystic" (11).

In Mythologies of Nothing, Anthony Libby deals with the myth which "informs" Plath's mystical experience. According to Libby, Plath shares with her husband the myth of the "Great Mother," who represents "the root or origin of life" (132). Describing the outcome of Plath's mystical journey to the Mother, Libby says:

She [Plath] was psychologically more vulnerable than Hughes to the Great Mother because she was a mother, and imaged herself as prey, but also because she identified with the vengeful aspect of the archetype. (148-49)

Libby states here that violence in Plath's poems is a result of her identification with the great Mother, the embodiment of terrible power. Although gender of the poet determines the outcome of the journey, Libby rejects detailed discussion about the issue. He makes it clear from the beginning that the gender approach either "fail[s] to take us deeply into her poetry" or "suggest[s] too reductive a preoccupation with Plath as victim" (126).

The advent of feminist critics brings the issue of gender to the foreground. In Plath's Incarnations, Bundtzen considers Plath as a woman poet who struggles to claim her artistic identity. For a woman to write within patriarchy, Bundtzen argues, she has to face the problem which Gilbert and Gubar refer to as "anxiety of authorship," a female analogue to the Bloomian term "anxiety of influence" for the male author (13). While the male author's anxiety motivates him to rebel against his poetic forefathers in order to establish himself as a "strong" poet, the female author's anxiety discourages her to write at all for fear of "various forms of punishment" (14).

The punishment Plath receives for her literary enterprise, according to Bundtzen, is her being accused as "a woman who succumbed to madness, unhealthy creative energies that presumably deformed her as a woman and a poet" (14). Bundtzen observes that while Gilbert and Gubar encourage a woman writer to transcend the male-constructed stereotypes of being either "an angel" or "a monster," the female writers they examine do not transcend but combine these two roles in a tactful way: they "ambivalently adopt both identities in their work, identifying femininity with self-abnegating 'angels' and artistic impulse with 'madwoman monsters' " (15).

Bundtzen uses the terms "Earth Mother" and "Lady Lazarus" to trace Plath's quest for identity. Plath's "anxiety of authorship" causes her to adopt the role of "the mother earth singer," which combines her feminine roles with her artistic ambition. After separating from her husband, Plath adopts a new identity of "Lady Lazarus," an image of the "autonomous woman artist" who asserts her "independent creative powers" (33). Plath's late poems, Bundtzen argues, illustrate the "art of incarnation," which involves the "destruction and recreation of her self" (34). Bundtzen expresses her ambivalence toward Plath's incarnation since "[t]he group of poems in which self-transformation is so triumphantly achieved is small" (35). Bundtzen reads such poems as "Edge," "Contusion," and "The Moon and the Yew Tree," which end with stasis and death, as evidence of Plath's surrender to "self-destructive impulses" (36).

In her essay, "Breaking Out: The Journey of the American Woman Poet," Janis P. Stout argues that gender exerts significant influence on a woman's journey. Rather than following "a topology of journey narrative,"

woman's quest has its own distinctive characteristics which reflect her position in society. Confined by social restrictions, the woman poet takes a voyage out for her freedom and independence. Consequently, the "focal point" of the journey is an "act of departure" (42). Stout, like Bundtzen, also links the journey motif with the woman's quest for identity.

Plath's journey, according to Stout, ends with ambiguity. The persona's escape, should it succeed at all, leads toward "self transcending death" which could be viewed as both triumph and defeat (44). In "Fever 103" and "Lady Lazarus," escape is preceded by self destruction. "[B]urning herself up" in "Fever 103" or "rising phoenixlike 'out of the ash' " in "Lady Lazarus," the protagonist does achieve triumph only in defeat or self-destruction (44). However, in many poems, the journey turns out to be "doomed gestures" (42). The persona is too "paralyzed" or too "mired in torment" to effect any release at all (43).

The critics I have discussed are chiefly concerned with the poet's vision, which is variously perceived as pathological, cosmic, and ambivalent (defeat in triumph). Their discussions form a kind of dialogue which enhances the criticism of Plath's work and helps in the formulation of assumptions about her poetry. Since the evaluation of Plath's poetry seems to be contingent upon the explanation of her vision, any analysis which claims to illuminate the poet's work should take into account the nature and value of her vision.

This thesis focuses on the poet's journey and her vision through a lens of mysticism. As Libby points out, Plath and many contemporary poets who belong to the post-Christian Age write mystical poetry, but their mysticism

is not primarily defined in the traditional sense. Instead of seeking a transcendent union with God, they set off on their journey to immerse in the immanent flow of water and lower forms of beings such as animals and plants. In attempting to explain Plath's journey and vision, I am also indebted to many feminist critics such as Bundtzen and Stout, who lead me to a belief that the gender of the writer matters. Although Plath shares with male poets her poetic vision of "mystical immanence," her journey reveals a distinctive character which belongs to a woman poet, the one leading her toward independent artistic identity. Moreover, since women writers, including Plath, have had to face anxieties of growing up female before they can assert themselves as authors, an attempt to chart the progress of the journey in Plath's poetry must be seen on two levels: social and spiritual.

The following chapters provide detailed analysis of the argument I have introduced in this chapter. The second and the third chapters are devoted to the study of mysticism. To understand the mystical journey of Plath, we need first to understand the meaning and characteristics of mysticism. The emphasis of these two chapters will be on the so-called Mystical Way, namely, awakening, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul, and unity, which provides a framework of the journey for postmodern visionary poetry. In chapter four, we will examine the mystical tradition which appears in Plath's poetry and in the works of other contemporary poets such as Roethke, Bly, and Merwin. This chapter will focus on how the mystical vision of postmodern poets is different from that of traditional mystics. My criticism of Plath's journey and vision will be given in chapters five and six. Since two dimensions combine a single journey of Plath's

heroine, chapter five will first deal with the heroine's social quest for her identity, which is primarily defined in her relation to men. After the protagonist in Plath's early poems has fulfilled her social roles and found them insufficient and dissatisfying, she begins to explore and develop spiritually. The protagonist's spiritual quest is then the subject of chapter six. Central to the heroine's spiritual quest is her vision of death-transformation-rebirth. Instead of viewing death and rebirth as the opposite poles of defeat and triumph, which leads many critics to express ambivalence toward Plath's vision, I want to argue that in Plath's vision death and rebirth coexist. Death is not an end in itself but an intermediate process toward rebirth.

CHAPTER TWO: MYSTICISM

Mysticism is a formidable term. Almost all writers who attempt to explain what mysticism is profess the difficulty of the task. They point out that there is no single, simple, and wholly satisfactory definition of the term. The definition of mysticism found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1901), however, is an apt one for my purpose of analysis:

Mysticism is a phase of thought or rather perhaps of feeling, which from its very nature is hardly susceptible to exact definition. It appears in connection with the endeavour of the human mind to grasp the divine essence or the ultimate reality of things and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest. The first is the philosophical side of Mysticism; the second its religious side. The first is theoretical or speculative; the second practical. The thought that is most intensely present with the mystic is that of a supreme, all-pervading, and in-dwelling power, in whom all things are one. Hence the speculative utterances of mysticism are always more or less pantheistic in character. On the practical side Mysticism maintains the possibility of direct intercourse with the Being of beings--intercourse, not through any external media, such as an historical revelation, oracles, answers to prayer, and the like, but by a species of ecstatic transfusion or identification, in which the individual becomes in very truth partaker of the divine nature. God ceases to be an object to him and becomes an experience.

(123)

The distinction between the "philosophical or speculative," and the "religious or practical" aspects of mysticism needs an adjustment if we are to understand exactly the term "mysticism." Many who write about mysticism agree that mysticism is essentially practical and not theoretical. Therefore, the line should be drawn between mystical philosophy on one hand and mysticism on the other. The former attempts to render a descriptive explanation of the latter, which is actually ineffable. Hence, the knowledge about mysticism or mystical philosophy is by no means compatible with the experience of the thing itself. In her classic book Mysticism, Evelyn Underhill distinguishes between a mystic and a mystical philosopher: "often a true mystic is also a mystical philosopher; though there are plenty of mystical philosophers who are not and could never be mystics" (95). The key notion is that "Not to know about, but to *Be*, is the mask of the real initiate" (72). We have to be mystics if we are at all to recognize what mysticism is.

In fact, the transcendental faculty which enables the mystic to achieve a union with the Ultimate Reality is the birthright of every person. This is supported by the fact that mysticism depends on our innate knowledge or intuition, not on any outward or intellectual perception. The mystic touch felt by many people, says Brenda C. Broers, might be "an undercurrent of restlessness, a vague longing of something, which they cannot define or even well understand" (6). Such feelings, if more conscious and more intense, will eventually launch an individual to a mystical quest which usually occurs unexpectedly and unwilled. Hence, Geraldine E. Hodson argues, "the soul needs some stimulus, some light of a far-away hope; it

cannot embark on a quest from a mere vacuity; it must be aware or at least dream of something; it will never set out on an empty search nor seek an absolutely hidden goal" (4). This "stimulus" is analogous to Underhill's "transcendental perception" which is drowned by the turmoil of worldly concern in ordinary people but is a governing factor in the life of a mystic.

Mysticism appears enigmatic and mysterious because it is incommunicable by ordinary language. Indeed, one might wonder about the relationship between the terms "mysticism" and "mystery." According to W.R. Inge, "The history of the term "mysticism" begins in close connection with the Greek mysteries. A mystic is one who has been or is being initiated into some esoteric knowledge of Divine things, about which he must close the lips" (4). The mystics of the past thus form a private league of those who speak a 'common language' unknown to the outsiders. Oftentimes, the mystics tell us that the object of their quest has no image. They use such terms as "faceless," "nothingness," and "the unknown unknown" to define the Reality. This is not because they do not really know what the Truth is, but because the true experience cannot be rendered by word.

By what means, we might ask, should an uninitiate learn at all about the Divine Reality? Or to put it the other way, how does a mystic manage to tell his spiritual adventures if he claims that his experiences are ineffable? The link between mysticism and the Greek rituals provides an important clue to these questions. A significant characteristic of the Greek Mysteries is that they abound with myths and symbols. In his book Rites and Symbols of Initiation, Mircea Eliade notes, "The Eleusian mysteries, like the Dionysiac ceremonies were founded on a divine myth; hence the succession

of rites reactualized the primordial event narrated in the myth, and the participants in the rites were progressively introduced into the divine presence" (110). The symbolic rituals then represent a way of teaching the initiate the secret Reality. The emphasis is still on the practice since the rituals require the initiates' direct participation in the stories of myth. In Mysticism, Underhill also points out the necessity of symbolism for any description of the mystical experience:

Thanks to the spatial imagery inseparable from human thinking and human expression, no direct description of spiritual experience is or can be possible to man. It must always be symbolic, allusive, oblique: always suggest, but never tell, the truth...The greater the suggestive quality of symbol used, the more answering emotion it invokes in those to whom it is addressed, the more truth it will convey. (126)

The symbolic language is then used by the mystics who wish to share with the outsiders their first-hand experiences with the Reality.

Numerous accounts of traditional mystics which come down to us reveal that there are different grades of consciousness on the path toward union with the Reality. An attempt to distinguish carefully the stages of spiritual growth, however, is doomed to failure since, as a matter of fact, there is no definite line to be drawn. Describing the stages through which the mystics typically pass, Arthur L. Clements thus says, "Few travellers of the *via mystica* present them in perfection, and in many cases some stages are blurred, not readily apparent, or even absent" (xiii). The difficulty of division lies in the fact that mysticism is an individual and personal

experience. The mystics differ enormously from one another and so do their stages of spiritual development toward union with the Divine. However, for the sake of analysis, we will follow Underhill's distinction of five stages of spiritual development; namely, awakening, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul, and union. This is the so-called Mystic Way, which is characterized by the soul's alternate experiences between "pleasure and pain," "the sunshine and the shade" before it reaches the final stage of union (168).

The first step of the spiritual life must be the awakening or the conversion of the mystic, who becomes aware of the Reality and sets his face toward that goal. The soul awakening to Reality realizes its own imperfection in contrast with the all perfection of the divine Reality. Thus, the mystic undergoes purification in order to get rid of the obstacles which separate him from the Object of his desire. In other words, the mystic seeks to be cleansed from the senses, to be stripped of all that is opposed to the Divine, and so to be fit to pass on to the next step of Illumination. Having reduced the gap between the self and Reality, the mystic moves closer enough to enjoy a transient flash of the divine Beauty. This moment of Illumination is a reward after the pain and suffering endured by the mystic during purification. Not yet, however, for the genuine mystic, is the battle fought and the laurel won. There follows a process in which he undergoes a total transmutation from one mode to another mode of life. This process, usually known as Dark Night of the Soul, is "the most terrible of all the experiences of the Mystic Way" (Underhill 169). Not only the physical nature but also the interior self of the mystic must be purged during this

stage. When all the faculties, the will, and the intellect are cleansed and brought into harmony with the Reality, the mystic reaches the final stage of the Mystic Way. Union, says Underhill, is "a true goal of the mystic"--"a stage of equilibrium, of purely spiritual life; characterized by peaceful joy, by enhanced power, by intense certitude" (170). It is a stage in which the antithesis between the self and the Divine is dissolved. The mystic passes from Becoming to Being; the self is lost and found again in the divine Reality.

In this chapter, we have discussed the meaning and characteristics of mysticism. The fact that mysticism is essentially concerned with the intimate experience of the divine Reality and that the Mystic Way, which progressively brings the mystic to a union with that Reality, is evidently connected to an inner, psychological process might lead us to see a relation between mysticism and psychology. We will then discuss this issue in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: UNVEILING THE ISIS

In this chapter, we will investigate the relation between the self and the Reality from a psychological perspective. Our discussion about this relation is meant to provide a psychological explanation for two important questions: What is the nature of the Reality? and What does it mean for the mystic who claims to achieve that Reality? We will approach these two questions, beginning with the discussion of the two opposites which strike us about the nature of divine Reality and the mystic's claim that Truth must be discovered from within. We will then attempt to explain these issues, using the Jungian notion of individuation.

Although all accounts of mystical experience agree on essential details, the experience itself is never entirely independent of the subject. Underhill's description of an individual's relation to the Divine in Mysticism supports our claim:

All men, at one time or another, have fallen in love with the veiled Isis whom they call Truth. With most, this has been a passing passion: they have early seen its hopelessness and turned to more practical things. But others remain all their lives the devout lovers of reality: though the manner of their love, the vision which they make to themselves of the beloved object, varies enormously. Some see Truth as Dante saw Beatrice: an adorable and yet intangible figure, found in this world yet revealing the next. To others she seems rather an evil but an irresistible enchantress: enticing, demanding payment and betraying her lover at last.

Some have seen her in a test tube, and some in a poet's dream:
 some before the altar, others in the slime. The extreme
 pragmatists have even sought her in the kitchen; declaring that
 she may best be recognized by her utility. Last stage of all, the
 philosophic skeptic has comforted an unsuccessful courtship by
 assuring himself that his mistress is not really there. (3-4)

Reality described by Underhill appears at once the same and different. We might then generate the two aspects of the Real: absolute and relative. The first type of Reality--the absolute One or the "veiled Isis"--is timeless and universal. It is present as a pure, abstract idea, the "transcendental consciousness," possessed by the mystics and all human beings. Time and again, a strange feeling might occur to us of something mysterious and beyond our finite ken. Such feeling is possibly accounted for by the fact that we are all born with this divine potential. While the first type of Reality seems to exist outside human conditions, the second type of Reality--the relative One--is inseparable from the subject who experiences it. It is the Reality revealed to individual mystics who seek in earnest the Reality they have intuited by their transcendental perception. These mystics, who are engaged in "unveiling the Isis," transform the pure, abstract idea of Reality into the concrete image which is not only personal and subjective but also "real" to them.

Some mystics describe their spiritual experience as an inward journey--a travelling through layers of consciousness to unite with the Reality in the innermost part of the self. This means that every human being is by nature akin to the Reality and that the self must be real if it ever

hopes to contact with that Reality. Hence, Underhill distinguishes the two aspects of human personality: the superficial and the inner selves. The superficial self, Underhill argues, reacts to the sense world of experience and is recognized as the sum of "conscious feeling, thought, and will" (51). The inner self, which is far greater than the superficial one, is referred to the depth or the bottom of the soul. This depth of the soul, according to Underhill, is "the unity, the Eternity" and hence a place where the self perceives the transcendental consciousness (52). "Since normal man," claims Underhill, "is utterly unable to set up relations with spiritual reality by means of his feeling, thought, and will, it is clearly in the depth of being--in these unplumbed levels of personality--that we must search, if we would to find the organ, the power, by which he is to achieve the mystical quest" (52). The germ of the mystic life, therefore, is found in the depth of our soul, the point of juncture where the mystic marriage between the self and the Divine takes place.

In the contact with the Reality, the mystic is endowed with the divine energy and the sense of spiritual fulfillment. Underhill thus says:

He who says the mystic is but a half man, states the exact opposite of the truth. Only the mystic can be called a whole man, since in others half the powers of the self always sleep. This wholeness of experience is much insisted on by the mystics. (63)

There are two ramifications in Underhill's statement. First, there exists a hidden power lying dormant and below the threshold of consciousness. In the mystics this power is activated and developed to such a high degree that it emerges within the conscious field and becomes a dominant element

which sustains and guides their "normal" existence (63). Second, the emergence of this hidden self makes it necessary to rearrange the feeling, thought, and will which constitute our character. The self, which has gone through this process of readjustment, achieves a new center of life, a result of the balance between the hidden self and the conscious one (64).

The mystic's inner relation with the divine Reality enables us to view a purely psychological and hence relative conception of the Divine and His relation with man. Before beginning my discussion about these issues from the psychological perspective, I want to make clear my own position on the relation between mysticism and psychology. I have earlier pointed out that mysticism is never entirely independent of a person who experiences it. The transcendent Truth filtered through the minds of the mystics is subject to individual interpretations and thereby appears different from one person to another. Therefore, I agree with Wendy Wright as she says, "Certainly the contemplative journey, from the point of view of the individual especially, cannot be conceived apart from one's own unique psychology. Any spirituality that claims to exist apart from concrete experience or pretends to bypass the human would seem to run the risk of being illusory or meaningless. Psychological data must always be an important part of the spiritual life" (108). However, an attempt to reduce all aspects of mystical experience to psychology is misleading. One characteristic of mysticism, we should not forget, is ineffable. Since the mystical experience itself cannot be rendered by word, any given explanation of such experience must be viewed as partial and therefore inadequate. We might take, for example, Underhill's description of the depth of the soul as "infinite" and "unfathomable" to

understand how complex the spiritual life is. Wright therefore warns us that we should not equate spirituality and psychology: "as much help as traditional psychological theory can be in the clarification of the self, it alone is not enough to explore the farthest limits of what it is to be human" (109).

Mystical psychology is possibly viewed from the Jungian concept of individuation. Broadly defined, Jung's individuation is a lifelong, self-developmental process whereby a person brings recessive potentials into balanced relation with more conscious or highly developed potentials. Jung believes that "individuation is achieved by either sex and that the 'mature' person would balance or develop in relatively equal proportions opposite qualities in the psyche" (Lauter 5). Individuation expounded by Jung should not be confused with "individuality" or "the attainment of an individual ego-identity" (Samuels 100). The final aim of individuation is the realization or totality of the self by which Jung obviously means the personal blend of the conscious with not only the unconscious but also the collective unconscious. The integration of the three psychic elements which constitute the whole concept of the self will therefore open up the field of consciousness to include the collective and the unique, the universal and the personal (101-02).

In Masculine and the Feminine: The Natural Flow of Opposite in the Psyche, Gareth S. Hill advances the Jungian concept of individuation. Hill's model describes the development of an individual's personality, following three important steps of integration, disintegration, and reintegration of the self. These three steps, I would argue, correspond to the symbolic journey taken by the mystic from life, to death, and to rebirth.

In the first half of the life, according to Jung, a "heroic ego" struggles to be free from the mother and establish its independence. This is present in Hill's model as a transition from the static feminine to the dynamic masculine. The individual is at first contained in the static feminine, the original state of being during which the ego enjoys its unity with the external world. Lacan refers to the self at this state as "l'homlette," a human omelette which spreads in all directions and corresponds to what Freud describes as the "oceanic self." However, the recognition of the self as autonomous and thereby separated from others occurs later when the person moves toward differentiation. In Jungian psychology, this period of differentiation or dynamic masculine is governed by the "archetype of the Dragon-Slaying hero." Describing this period, Hill says:

It encompasses the maturation of the cognitive functioning and the major period of exploration and discovery through education and movement into the world...This development classically reaches its apex in late adolescence, during which the young person is establishing a sense of identity that may be quite different from what the parents would wish. In this context, the Dragon Slayer is slaying the devouring aspects of the parental complex that would deny him his individuality and autonomy. (28)

The movement toward differentiation is analogous, in the Freudian and Lacanian scenarios, to the subject's initiation into the symbolic world dominated by the Law of the Father. During this stage, the subject not only acquires its language but also internalizes its values and principles.

An individual then passes on to the integration, characterized by

his "submission to objective authority." During this stage, the person searches for a place in the social order, establishing socially-oriented goals such as career, home, and family. The period of integration reaches its apex in middle life when the dynamic masculine is frozen into the static one. By this time, says Hill, "there is a considerable one-sidedness of development and perspective, from which many lived potentialities of the Self have been suppressed or split off and remain to be awakened from the unconscious" (28-29). Consequently, the person may experience the inner lack, the inadequacy of his life, and the disintegration of social values and identity. In a particular person, such feeling may be so intense that it motivates him to begin the reintegrating task--a regressive move from the static masculine to unite with the dynamic feminine. The quest for a deeper meaning of life, I would suggest, is analogous to the mystic's awakening to Reality. Our argument is supplemented by Underhill's description of the awakening as a "disturbance of the equilibrium of the self, which results in the shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels, with a consequent removal of the centre of interest from the subject to an object now brought into view" (176). This longing for renewal, for a change in the way of life is also found in the "middle life crisis" of disintegration.

According to Hill's model, "individuation"--the conjunction, in the Jungian sense, between the masculine and the feminine--is not yet a final stage. The self, which has been familiarized with the static masculine, rebels against the new awareness of the dynamic feminine. Hill describes this dynamic feminine:

The elemental experience of the dynamic feminine is the base from which flows all later experience of the mystery of spontaneous realization, highlighting the limitations of the established static-masculine order and the unfathomable possibilities in experience. This frontier of knowledge is in the inner world, a gnosis that derives from the undirected, spontaneous flow of experience itself, producing new insight, the ecstatic experience of "aha!" This experience can be frightening and disorienting, however, and there is a natural tendency to cling to the security of the known static-masculine order, a natural resistance to moving toward making the watery, initiatory transit from the dynamic feminine to the static feminine. (42)

Hill regards the process of individuation as an adaptation or adjustment of the self to the new, orienting experience. The struggle which occurs during this stage corresponds to the mystic's purification. The moment of the self in contact with the dynamic feminine shares an important characteristic with the mystic's experience of illumination--a sudden emergence of the hidden, spontaneous power into the field of consciousness. The dynamic feminine, Hill argues, expresses itself in an unconscious fantasy of "a beautiful woman, the neglected anima..., who functions as muse or inspiratrice and who has been the subject of artists and poets from time immemorial" (29). Such inspiration, according to Underhill, also occurs with the mystic of the artistic type, who is visited by the Muse during the Illumination (63).

In Hill's diagram, a person must undergo Watery Initiations if he is to achieve the final stage of development. In "crossing the water," the individual is "dead" to the "old outer adaptation" and "born" to a "new sense of wholeness that encompasses more fully the inner and outer worlds of experience and the mystery of being" (42-43). This death-and-rebirth experience finds its symbolic expression in the "Night Sea Journey." Hill finds an example of this journey in a dream account given by a young man:

I followed a beautiful woman who dived into a deep pool of water and went down to greater and greater depths. I realized that I would be unable to breathe much longer but felt compelled to follow her. Finally, I knew I was going to drown. I was terrified but decided not to fight it, and everything went black as I died in the water. I soon awakened, however, and saw the most utterly beautiful and awe-inspiring spherical form of many wondrous colors. I felt completely at peace. (43)

Death by water described in the dream is a most recurrent theme in modern and contemporary mystical literature. In fact, we might compare the Jungian Night Sea Journey to the mystic's Dark Night of the Soul. The latter, according to Underhill, describes the mystical death, the preliminary stage before the mystic's achievement of the unitive life.

The Jungian theory that both men and women have their roots in the feminine is important to our analysis of mystical accounts told by the mystics of either sex. However, we need to emphasize that psychoanalysis is far from being neutral. Indeed, many critics note that the Jungian paradigms are more suited to men's experience than women's. This is the

case when we consider the concepts of animus and anima, which are included here, for the terms are used by Jung and other critics to refer to the masculine and feminine aspects, and to explain the relation between the self and the other which is originated from within the individual's psyche.

According to Jung, animus and anima are contrasexual components in the psyche of women and men respectively; that is, animus is the image of man in the psyche of the female and anima is the image of woman in the psyche of the male (Hill 176). In other words, there exists in the psyche of all human beings a complementarity of masculine and feminine principles. According to Andrew Samuels, "Jung's use of animus and anima can be better understood by regarding them as archetypal structures or capacities" (212). In this sense, animus and anima are capable of projecting images which represent an innate aspect of men and women--that aspect which has been suppressed in their conscious lives and thereby appears mysteriously strange though full of potentials and possibilities. Elsewhere Jung asserts that animus or anima-projected figures function as "guides or sources of wisdom and information" (212). A person then might search for the other half, which will guide him toward fulfillment. Thus, Watery Initiations, a gateway the soul must pass toward a unified whole or rebirth of new-consciousness, require first a union of the opposites: conscious and unconscious, the masculine and the feminine.

The problem I have with Jung is that he seems to develop his theories using the male as a model. Critics such as Estella Lauter and Carol Rupprecht, for example, point out that Jung's concept of animus, the

masculine aspect of the female psyche, is "deductive and conjectural." They cite as an example Jung's following passage:

Since anima is an archetype that is found in men, it is reasonable to suppose that an equivalent archetype must be present in women; for just as the man is compensated by a feminine element, so the woman is compensated by a masculine one. (Lauter 8)

Obviously, Jung's central concern is men not women, and his concepts, as Lauter and Rupprecht point out, reveal a "tendency to see the world as organized into the opposites" (Lauter 8). Describing the relation between a woman and her animus, Jung also argues:

Woman is compensated by a masculine element and therefore her unconscious has, so to speak, a masculine imprint. This results in considerable difference between men and women, and accordingly I have called the projection-making factor in women the animus, which means mind or spirit. (Lauter 8)

Given his notion that both men and women have their roots in the feminine unconscious and that it is the feminine aspect which is suppressed in both culture and individuals, Jung is inconsistent here when he argues that a woman's unconscious is predominantly masculine.

Following Jung's concepts of anima and animus, we should also expect that men are searching for the anima and women the animus. However, this is not always the case, especially for women in a patriarchal society. As Hill points out, "If a woman's identity should be dominated by masculine consciousness, we have traditionally thought of her as 'animus ridden' and cut off in an unfortunate way from her feminine roots" (33). In

this case, the anima and its energies are repressed and falls into the unconscious. The woman who suffers from this animus-ridden symptom consequently seeks to reconcile with her anima, her other half which has been lost.

Jung's notion of animus and anima, despite his deductive approach and some confusion, could be profitably used in the examination of the many "faces" of Reality revealed to individual mystics. Psychologically, these images--be they God of Christian mystics, the Muse of the poet's dream, or Dante's Beatrice--are manifestations of the hidden energy or potential activated from within the depth of the self and projected on to any real objects or concrete forms. Such figures and images are accordingly interpreted as anima or animus otherness, the representative of alternative modes of perception and behaviour. In saying so, I do not want to be accused of reducing mysticism to psychology. My point here is that the mystics, in their searching for an intimate union with the Reality, transform this abstract and pure notion of the Real into a concrete form or image which is meaningful to them. And this intimate and personal relation between the mystic and the Reality is possibly accounted for by psychological theories.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MYSTICAL TRADITION OF CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (Revelation)

originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the external world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling--a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world. (Sigmund Freud)

Obviously, the "Year" is variously conceived by primitives, and the dates of the "New Year" differ in accordance with climate, geographical setting, type of culture, and so on. But there is always a cycle, that is, a period of time that had a beginning and an end. Now, the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next are marked by a series of rituals whose purpose is the renewal of the World. (Mircea Eliade)

Modern physics is on the brink of Nirvana, the man who follows Einstein right through achieves in the end a state of ecstasy which

is the culmination of the way of knowledge. There is a short-cut, through ritual, through yoga practice. And there is the long, long way from Thales and Anaximander down to Einstein. But the final state of consciousness achieved is about the same, in each case.

(D.H. Lawrence)

The words are different, the paths are many, but one thing is signified; the paths lead to one Person. (Everlyn Underhill)

Men of all ages are haunted by what Mircea Eliade calls the "Myth of the Eternal Return." The quotations above illustrate a similar experience of the soul's desire to reunite with Reality. And this desire is the essence of mysticism. Considering the timeless, universal aspect of the mystical experience, it is not surprising when a critic notes that contemporary American poetry is often mystical poetry (Libby 1). Indeed, such poets as Roethke, Bly, and Merwin, whose works reveal affinities with Plath's, follow the mystical tradition of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Unlike the mystics of the past, most of whom belong to the Church, contemporary poets do not consider Christianity as the "best map" to chart their spiritual adventures. In the twentieth century, mysticism, both enriched and diluted by modern sciences such as psychology, anthropology, and even new physics, is developing toward a secular mode which emphasizes the immanent rather transcendent aspect of the experience.

Many contemporary poets find the roots of their secular mysticism in Medieval and Renaissance mystical philosophy. Great mystics of the past,

Underhill argues, are members of the Church. They borrow from Christianity its terminology, symbols, and imagery to describe their mystical experience with Reality. The relation between the mystics and the Church, described by Underhill, is an interesting one which involves the tension between the orthodox convention of the Church and the mystics' claim for spiritual freedom. Although some mystics feel secure and thrive in the Church, many rebel against it. Eckhart was condemned by the Church for his "pantheism and other heresies" while Tauler and Suso were active members of an unorthodox movement known as "the Friends of God" (Underhill 463-64). These mystics, it should be noted, quarreled with the Church and yet remained all their lives within it. It follows that their rebellions against the Church were possibly motivated by their desire to adjust rather than forsake altogether the religious means to describe their spiritual experience.

An important concept of Christian philosophy is the separation between mind and matter, spirit and body. In tracing the historical development of mysticism, Underhill argues that mysticism finds its expression in the three original sources: Greek, Oriental, and Christian (455). However, it is the Neoplatonism of Greek, Underhill claims, which becomes the most influential vehicle for the mystical experience. "Hence, the early mysticism of Europe, both Christian and pagan, has come down to us in a Neoplatonic dress; and speaks the tongue of Alexandria rather than that of Jerusalem, Athens, or Rome" (456). The issue here is that Neoplatonism, which is concerned with the exultation of mind over matter, is later fused into Christian theology.

Traditional, Christian orthodoxy, informed by the Neoplatonic concepts of dualistic opposition, is both anti-sexuality and anti-feminism. The derogatory view of the body as inferior to the spirit results in the religious demand to transcend the body in the pursuit of the spiritual goal. More important is that the valorization of the spirit over the body inevitably leads toward the denigration of women, who have been equated to the body or the material. Dorothy H. Donnell describes Christian antagonism to the worshipping of the goddesses: "As the Hebrews had fought the pagan goddesses, so the Jewish converts to Christianity had to struggle with the devotees of the Egyptian Isis and the Phygian Magna Mater whose cults were all pervasive" (121). Since women have been associated with the material, and thereby the nonspiritual and the sexual, the cults of goddesses like those of Isis were regarded as an "aberration" by the early Church (121-22).

The suppression of women in patriarchal theology is linked with the suppression of nature understood as woman. Nor Hall provides a classic example of the relation between women and the moon: "Imagine the new silvery moon crescent as the virgin or the nymph, the full moon as the mother pregnant with life, the old moon as old crone or withered woman descending into the darkness of death, only to rise again" (3). Women are thus considered an embodiment of a natural force, the one to be suppressed by men. In the Bible, the most important source of Christian philosophy, the relation between man and nature is seen in terms of master-slave: "God blessed them [male and female] and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and

the birds of the air and over every living creatures that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28). In The Lord's Dealing, Robert Faricy regards the suppression of women and nature as the suppression of the feminine:

The suppression of the feminine has historically involved much more than the oppression of women, although the two are inseparable. In speaking of the suppression of the feminine, we have to consider also the oppression of nature (the ecological problem) and the devaluation of the feminine aspects of culture and of human nature as we find it in both women and men. (3)

The psychological import derived from the superimposition of mind over matter, spirituality over sexuality, is then the suppression of the feminine which is inextricably linked with women and nature.

The close relation between the Church and the mystics might lead us to think that mysticism and theology are the same. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish mystical life and religious life since the boundaries between the two are often blurred and overlapped. However, among the most important characteristics found in the accounts of many mystics, I would suggest, is their emphasis on spiritual freedom rather than religious conformity. These mystics, living their active and creative lives, transform an unthinking traditional faith into their personal conviction. Hence, the religious doctrine is, for them, not an end in itself but a means which is subject to change and modification to suit their spiritual experience.

Two important characteristics of traditional mysticism inherited from Christian theology are the doctrine of emanation and the predominant vision of God. Underlying these two characteristics is the dualistic

opposition between the spirit and matter, the divine and the earthly. The mystics' use of these religious concepts to describe their spiritual experience nonetheless reveals their effort to blend the opposites, to bridge a gap, and to restore a harmony of the contrary elements. According to Underhill, the doctrine of emanation in its extreme form advocates the "absolute transcendence of God" (97). "The Absolute Godhead," Underhill argues, "is conceived as removed by a vast distance from a material of sense; the last or lowest of that system of dependent world or states which, generated by or emanating from the Unity or Central Sun, become less in spirituality and splendour, greater in multiplicity, the further they recede from their source" (97). Since the soul has descended from the superior world to the body, the way back to reunite with God is to transcend both the body and the physical world. Hence, in The Dialogue, St. Catherine of Siena describes the three stairs on which the soul mounts to God. She imagines God communicating to her:

The first stair is the feet, which symbolize affections. For just as the feet carry the body, the affections carry the soul. My Son's nailed feet are a stair by which you can climb to his side, where you can see revealed in his inmost heart. For when the soul has climbed up on the feet of affection and looked with her mind's eye into my Son's opened heart, she begins to feel the love of her own heart in his consummate and unspeakable love...Then the soul, seeing how tremendously she is loved, is herself filled to overflowing with love. So, having climbed the second stair, she reaches the third. This is his mouth, where she finds peace from

the terrible war she has had to wage because of her sin. (The Feminist Mystic 14)

To reach the pure, transcendent God, the soul must emancipate itself from the bondage of the body which is regarded as corrupt and sinful. However, Catherine also emphasizes that only through Christ does the soul ever hope to meet God. Christ is thus functioning as a bridge joining both the body and the spirit, man and God.

In traditional mysticism, the vision of transcendent God prevails. However, the image of God described by many mystics is far from being remote, lifeless, or static. These mystics, putting their emphasis on personal revelation, often portray God as lover or mother. The rediscovery of these immanent visions in the image of transcendent God restores, in a sense, a balance between the spirit and the body, the masculine and the feminine.

The image of God as lover is found in the writings of both male and female mystics. Hadewijch of Antwerp is considered by Harvey Egan in his Anthology of Christian Mysticism, "perhaps the most sublime exponent of love mysticism in the Western tradition" (225). The central theme throughout Hadewijch's writings is the soul's yearning for the possession of God, who is love (226). The following excerpt from her work suffices for an illustration:

The souls engulfed in God who are thus lost in him are illuminated on the side by the light of love, as the moon receives its light from the sun. The simple knowledge then received by them in this new light, from which they come and in which they dwell--*this simple*

light then catches their darker half, so that the two halves of the soul become one; and then there is full light. (Anthology 231) [emphasis mine]

The dualistic opposition of the two halves of the soul is resolved into a higher synthesis--the union which endows the mystic with peaceful joy and serenity. Another mystic, Henry Suso, regards his contact with God as the "spiritual espousals with eternal wisdom" (Anthology 335). Suso describes, in a third person narrative, his vision of the "unveiled Isis" or Goddess of Wisdom: "now his heart was captivated by Lady Wisdom who, under guise of a gracious maiden and clothed in velvet and adorned with diamonds, gladdened all hearts by her fair words. In the refectory, while listening to the reader ministering to the spiritual nourishment of the brethren, he first saw the beauty of the countenance of Eternal Wisdom... He said to himself: 'Help me! That's the plain truth. There is only one thing for me to do; she shall be my bride, and I shall be her Servitor' " (336). Like Hadewijch's, Suso's mystical experience--his spiritual espousals--with the Goddess of Wisdom combines his religious vision with affective emotions.

Closely linked with the image of God as lover is an affective, psychological, and personal aspect of God understood as mother. In fact, Suso's "Lady Wisdom" appears to him as both mother and lover: "When he enjoyed the familiar presence of Eternal Wisdom he felt like a smiling babe held securely on its mother's lap hungrily nuzzling its head against her breast" (Anthology 337). The union with God is described by Suso in terms of a regression to childhood, the primal state during which he, like a child who has not learned to distinguish itself from its mother, is deeply united

with God and could not be conceived of apart from His divine existence. A well-known mystic, Julian of Norwich, describes the motherhood of God and Christ:

I understand three ways of contemplating motherhood in God. The first is the foundation of our nature's creation; the second is his taking of our nature, where the motherhood of grace begins; and the third is the motherhood at work. (Anthology 394)

And Christ, Julian further argues, is "our true Mother by nature, by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature" (Anthology 394). It needs to be emphasized that Julian invokes the feminine aspect of God (and Christ) to make it balance with His masculine aspect since her argument is grounded on the fact that "As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother...And our substance is in our Father, God almighty, and our substance is in our Mother, God all wisdom" (Anthology 393).

The decline of religion has wrought a profound change in our consciousness and henceforth our vision of life in the world. In the modern period, mysticism is not primarily understood or appreciated within the context of Christianity. Not only does the vision of God no longer prevail but also the transcendent God himself steps down, never to rise again. As Anthony Libby notes, the secular mode of modern mysticism, found in the writings of many modern and contemporary poets, is immanent rather than transcendent: "When St. Theresa speaks of rising (sometimes of physical levitation), transcendence, the modern mystics tend to imagine descent, immersion, frequently immersion in dark water, as the sign of union. Even

when their theology...or their terminology...implies transcendence, their imagery tends to dramatize immanence, participation into the flow of this world. Frequently transcendence struggles with immanence in a particular poet's vision; often immanence wins" (5). Instead of looking upward or outward to the transcendent God, these visionary poets dive into the watery flow. There they allegedly discover and unite with a new deity or the unconscious feminine, which has been suppressed in both individuals and cultures.

A consideration of Sylvia Plath's poetry along the line of the mystical tradition is not at all impossible. Indeed, her poems have affinities with the two contemporaries poets, Roethke and Bly, who derive their poetic inspiration from spiritual accounts of traditional mystics, and with a visionary poet, M.S. Merwin, whose mystical experience finds its expression in his mythic consciousness of the world.

Roethke's influence on Plath is acknowledged by the poet herself.

Recalling her correspondence with Plath, Anne Sexton says:

I remember writing to Sylvia in England after The Colossus came out and saying something like..."if you're not careful, Sylvia, you will out--Roethke Roethke," and she replied that I had guessed accurately and that he had been a strong influence on her work.
(178)

Plath's acknowledgement of Roethke's influence might not allow us to say that they also write in the same tradition. Poets who work in the same period often influence one another although their works falls into different categories. However, according to Libby, "Plath was predisposed to

Roethke's influence because she participated in certain aspects of his visionary consciousness before ever reading his poetry" (103). Libby's assertion that Plath and Roethke do write in the same tradition is supplemented by Ted Hughes, who notes in "The chronological order of Sylvia Plath's poems" that Plath reads Roethke's poems "closely and sympathetically for the first time" when she is working on "Poem for a Birthday," signifying therefore Plath's "recognition" rather than "discovery" of Roethke's influence on her poetry.

Roethke's mystical union is usually described in terms of his immersion into dark water. The persona in "The Long Water," for example, declares, "I lose and find myself in the long water;/ I am gathered together once more; I embrace the world" (Collected Poems 190). Roethke's vision of immersion is literally interpreted as death by drowning in such Plath poems as "Suicide Off Egg Rock," "Full Fathom Five," and "Lorelei." The undifferentiated, watery flow in which Plath and Roethke wish to submerge evidently takes the place of the transcendent God of the traditional mystics.

Immanent mysticism is linked with a regression into the primal state of being when the boundaries between the self and the external world have not been established. In The Lost Son, Roethke dramatizes a return to the childhood world, his greenhouse world which is regarded by the poet himself as a "symbol for the whole life, a womb, a heaven-on-earth" (Kalaidjian 8). Roethke's emphasis on transcendence in immanence is clear: the "heaven-on-earth" is achieved by his regressive participation, or rather his immersion, in the life-giving flow of energies generated from the "womb." Roethke's imagery of a regression into the womblike greenhouse and the

self's evolution from its dark cocooned gestation to its final emergence anticipate Plath's works. In Mythologies of Nothing, Libby notes some correspondences between Roethke's The Lost Son and Plath's series of poems entitled "Poem for a Birthday":

"Poem for a Birthday"...contains...Roethke's spirit as well as his style...In "Birthday" [Plath] operates partly in the potting shed world she had just seen Roethke describe as she studied his greenhouse poems for the first time. This is a world of immersion in a damp vegetable kingdom, "in the bowel of the root," among "little humble loves"...Not only do Roethke's words echo but the poems recall his excursions into loss of self and self-recovery.

(137)

A way back to the beginning for both poets is seen not only as a self-obliteration from the present existence but also a possibility for self-renewal or regeneration. While traditional mystics lose and find themselves in the transcendent God regarded as a mother (Julian of Norwich and Suso), a receptive womb (Eckhart), or a deep sea (St. Catherine of Siena), the "loss of self and self-recovery" illustrated by Roethke and Plath are contained in a physical world of immersion.

If Roethke's influence on Plath is seen in terms of her immersion in the physical world of flux and flowing, it is Bly's affinities with Plath that reinforce the psycho-spiritual aspects of her poetry. Bly's mystical psychology is chiefly informed by Boehme and Jung (Davis 12-13). Boehme's notion that spiritual fulfillment is to be achieved by the blend of the opposites--inner and outer, body and spirit, conscious and

unconscious--becomes one of Bly's major concerns (Davis 12). Much as Bly is influenced by Boehme, it is Jung who guides Bly's poetic direction. As Jung says, "The creative process has feminine quality, and the creative work arises from the realm of the Mothers" (Davis 86). Accordingly, Bly asserts, "A poem is something that penetrates for an instant into an unconscious" and later adds, "What is needed to write good poems about the outward world is inwardness" (Davis 10-11).

Bly's attempt to blend the two aspects of consciousness, the masculine and the feminine, is explicitly seen in his "Water under the Earth":

Faces look at me from the shallow water,
where I have put them down--
father and mother pushed into the dark. (Davis 71)

An attempt to bring into a balanced relation the spirits of mother and father is also illustrated by a traditional mystic, Julian of Norwich, in her account of the motherhood of God and Christ. However, what is revealed by Bly and many other contemporary visionary poets is that such a balance does not subsist in the transcendent image of God, but in the physical world and the flow of water. The following lines from Plath's "All the Dead Deers" (Plath, Collected Poems (hereafter referred to as CP), 70) sounds very similar to Bly's "Water under the Earth":

From the mercury-backed glass
Mother, grandmother, greatgrandmother
Reach hag hands to haul me in,
And an image looms under the fishpond surface

Where the daft father went down

With orange duck feet winnowing his hair--

Plath obviously shares with Bly a notion of the suppressed aspect of the self lying beneath the threshold of consciousness. The lines of Plath's poem suggest the spirit of the Father who "went down" in the pool of the dark psyche to unite with the spirit of the Mothers.

While many visionary writings like those of Roethke's culminate simply in a union or an immersion in the flow, some poets of immanence mysticism like Bly create their own deity. Libby thus says, "Bly is also typical, or at least not unusual, in his semi-anthropomorphic imagery of new divinity come to herald the apocalypse" (168). Bly's apocalyptic vision reminds us of Plath's late poems which depict the emergence of the unconscious feminine to stage a rebellion against patriarchal society.

Bly's emphasis on the unconscious extends to his idea of the new role of the poet. Bly argues that since "the two halves of the body respond to and embody the modes of the apposite brain lobe," the left side, which "favors feeling, music, motion, touch...the qualities in us that enable us to unite with objects and creatures," have been trapped by the "bent over" body and crushed. The poetry of the last hundred years, then, "is an effort to unfold the left side of the body." This unfolding of the left side is achieved through new developments among which is the "concept of the poet as a shaman" (Davis 8-9). Plath's role as a poet illustrates this new development. Ted Hughes uses the term "shaman" itself to describe Plath's poetic activity (Libby 135), and her late poems which are all against

abstract, dull and static masculine rationality show the influence of what Bly calls the "left side of the brain."

In "Notes toward biography," Lois Ames mentions in passing, "The Hugheses borrowed a study from the W.S. Merwins. Sylvia used it in the morning, and Ted in the afternoon" (169). What is "study" Plath shares with Merwin that might establish the poetic relation between the two poets is a matter of speculation because Ames provides no further information. However, we do know that Plath and Merwin are both influenced by Robert Graves's The White Goddess. According to Mark Christhilf, Merwin came into contact with Graves in 1950 and by that time Graves had perfected his prose version of The White Goddess (4-5). Christhilf argues that Merwin is influenced by Graves's book and by Graves himself, who represents "one of the most Romantic viewpoints in the modernist tradition" (5). About this tradition Christhilf explains:

In the current of modernism represented by Graves--and by Yeats and Edwin Muir--there is total repudiation of contemporary history and equally total affirmation of the mythological habit of mind. For these writers modern history since the Enlightenment was a false direction because of the stress on reasoning consciousness and on the acceptance of scientific materialism. Intellectual progress discredited an imaginative response to the world--the source both of myth and of poetry. (5)

The "mythological habit of mind" advocated by some modernists corresponds to the notion of the "left brain" developed by Bly. Like the left side of the brain, the mythological habit of the mind which responds to the

affective feeling, creative imagination, and intuition might allow us to see it as a vehicle of mystical consciousness. Also, Merwin himself claims that myth and poetry have the same goal: "both direct attention to humankind's unity with the cosmos" (Christhilf 2). Merwin's participation in myth consequently liberates him from personal experiences toward a universal pattern of human behaviour.

Merwin's appeal to The White Goddess is explicitly seen in his first two volumes: A Mask for Janus and The Dancing Bears (Christhilf 6). While Bly's psychological approach leads him toward the discovery of the female deity, the Great Mother, in his own unconscious, Merwin discovers a similar female deity through his study of Graves's story which asserts the supremacy of the Goddess in the ancient world. Similarly, Plath was introduced to Graves's The White Goddess later in 1956 by her husband, who was participating in the "White Goddess cult" (Kroll 40). References to the themes of the White Goddess myth are found in such Plath poems as "Faun," "Maudlin," "The Death of Myth Making," and "Ouija." Although Plath and Merwin inherit the same myth, they separately develop the mythic consciousness which enables them to support their mystical comprehension of the world and retell the story of myth for their poetic ends. About the White Goddess myth, Christhilf says:

It describes the rite of primitive matrilineal culture in which kings, who embodied the waxing and the waning spirit of the year, were sacrificed twice yearly to gain the favor of the goddess. In the central mystic tale the soul of the sacrificed "sun-king" would

inhabit the royal purgatory--an island or garden beyond Theresa,
where it would await renewal in the waxing half of the year. (5)

In his relation to Graves's story, Merwin identifies himself with the sun-king, who desires to be possessed by the Moon Muse, the White Goddess, and receives from her a regenerative life force, or in this case the creative imagination, which will ultimately liberate him from a "royal purgatory" (Christhilf 6-9). In "Festival," Merwin is explicit about this identification, declaring "I that am king of no country." However, it is in his "Margery's Song" that his appropriation of the White Goddess's identity is evidently clear. Christhilf explains that in this poem the goddess appears as Cardea (the mistress of Janus), who transforms herself into a bird and tries to eat her children (7). Thus, she says:

I am a jill-whisper

A nimble bird I saw:

Ruses were its children;

And friendly was the wind

But spoke me hungrily. (7)

Merwin's lines echo Plath's "Edge" (CP 272), not so much in poetic assonance as in his thematic treatment of violent death. In "Edge," the children are implicitly killed by their mother who declares:

We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,

One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.

The connection between the Medea-like persona and the White Goddess as a Moon Muse in "Edge" is seen from the fact that both the Moon and the persona are dead and cold: The moon, like the persona, "has nothing to be sad about,/ Staring from her hood of bone." While Merwin simply identifies himself with the sun-king, Plath not only regards the Moon Goddess as her Muse but also identifies with the Goddess herself. This relation between the poet and her Muse is also noted by Kroll: "the importance to Plath of the White Goddess was far more than as the symbol of poetic inspiration...Not only was the White Goddess her Muse, but the myth of the White Goddess seemed to be her myth" (40). Plath's participation in the myth reinforces her cosmic consciousness of unity in the sense that she sees her life as both defined and destined by the myth of the White Goddess.

A continuous line of development of the mystical tradition from the past to the present may be traced. Although contemporary mystical tradition illustrated by such poets as Roethke, Plath, Bly, and Merwin is better understood as a reaction to the transcendental vision of traditional mystics, these contemporary poets are indebted to the mystics of the past whose spiritual accounts guide their footsteps. Obviously, it is the dichotomy between the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious, the self and the other, the masculine and the feminine that the mystics of all ages struggle to overcome and bring into a balanced relation.

CHAPTER FIVE: VOYAGE OUT

I felt dreadfully inadequate. The trouble was, I had
been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it.
(Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar)

Plath's statement from her autobiographical novel The Bell Jar might reminds us of Freud's famous question, "What does woman want?" The term "want" used by Freud is better understood in this context as "lack," since the protagonist of the novel, who is obviously Plath herself, expresses her inner void, her yearning for self-fulfillment, and her desire to transcend her inadequate life. Such a condition, illustrated by Plath, will eventually induce her to the spiritual quest for the meaning of her life and identity. In Mysticism, Underhill argues that the mystical conversion, an awakening of the self to Reality, is seen in most cases as a "single and abrupt experience." However, she later adds, "the apparently abrupt conversion is really, as a rule, a sequel and a result of a period of restlessness, uncertainty, and mental stress. The deeper mind stirs uneasily in its prison, and its emergence is but the last of the many efforts to escape" (179). The beginning of Plath's spiritual life, I would suggest, is intimately connected with her social experience as a woman and poet. Central to her life, which is transformed into art, is her desire for perfection and self-integration, which is rejected by a male-dominated society. Plath's early poems illustrate not only her sense of loss and emptiness but also her failure and disappointment to integrate life and discover its meaning.

In Stealing the Language, Alicia Ostriker notes, "self-division is culturally prescribed, wholeness culturally forbidden, to the woman and the woman poet" (83). Plath's "Diary Supplement," written when she was seventeen, demonstrates her anxieties that her personal desire for fulfillment would be thwarted by social convention:

I am afraid of getting older. I am afraid of getting married. Spare me from cooking three meals a day...spare me from relentless cage of routine and rote. I want to be free--to know people and their backgrounds--free to move to different parts of the world so I may learn that there are other morals and standards besides my own. I want, I think, to be omniscient...I think I would like to call myself "The girl who wants to be God." Yet if I were not in this body, where would I be--perhaps I am destined to be classified. But, oh, I cry out against it. I am I--I am powerful--but to what extent? I am I...

Never, never, never will I reach the perfection I long for with all my soul--my paintings, my poems, my stories--all poor, poor reflections...

I am continually more aware of the power which chance plays in my life...There will come a time when I must face myself. Even now I dread the big choices which loom up in my life--what college? What do I want? I do not know. I love freedom. I deplore constrictions and limitations...I am not as wise as I have thought.
(Letters Home 37-38)

Here speaks a young girl who is about to enter an enclosure of society. Plath is both expectant and apprehensive toward her future. The self, as illustrated in the Diary, is born out of contradiction. The juxtaposition between her self-assertion of "I am I" and her expression of self-doubts, between her desire for Godlike perfection and her fear of the future and her own inadequacy seems to have its roots in a tension between her personal aspiration and her consciousness of social restrictions upon that desire.

Like other women, Plath enters the social order and internalizes its values and principles. Freud argues that the female subject's experience of powerlessness, inadequacy, and insecurity results not simply in her anti-feminism but motivates her to identify with men:

When she [a little girl] has passed beyond her attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that the sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least, in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man. (Silverman 142)

Regarding the whole female sex, including her mother, as powerless, the little girl takes side with her father. The female subject, according to Freud, can connect with the patriarchal power only indirectly through fulfilling her feminine roles as a wife and mother (143). In Method and Madness, Butscher presents the Sylvia Plath who is her father's daughter. According to Butscher, as Plath concentrates her feminine attentions upon her father, she develops her negative feelings toward her mother as a rival (11). In her

Journal, Plath reveals her resentment of her own sex and her desire to be like men:

I am jealous of men--a dangerous and subtle envy which can corrode, I imagine, any relationship. It is an envy born of desire to be active and doing, not passive and listening. (35)

Considering her own body as powerless and inferior, Plath embarks on a flight from womanhood. The fact that her body fails her as a woman, as a helpless victim in a patriarchal society, leads her toward a desire to transcend her own self and her inferior situation.

For a woman who aspires to social fulfillment, a split in personality seems inevitable. In Plath's case, her animus-ridden personality causes her a division between what Ostriker calls the "perfect external and ugly internal selves":

Plath's divided selves lock into place. There is a public self designed to please others, which is so perfect that it drives all antisocial "ugly" impulses back into secrecy, where they seethe and increase. Or there is an "ugly" self so distressing that an unbreakable self of "whiteness and beauty" must be invented to mask it. Either way, division is self-perpetuating. The Sylvia Plath who played perfect daughter, schoolgirl, eager young woman of letters and hard-working wife, and wrote the painfully cheerful Letters Home, created and was created by the Sylvia Plath who hated obedient role playing and wrote the angry and self-punishing The Bell Jar and Ariel. (83)

In fact, an individual usually creates a persona which hides his true nature and makes a particular impression on the surrounding world (Goldbrunner 40). For Plath, who seeks social approval and acceptance, the 'mask' becomes indispensable. Thus, Butscher says, "Myth was important to Sylvia--always, in particular, the myth of her own image" (52). The issue here is that the mask estranges her from her self and experience. The self Plath creates and attempts to live with is her social or "public" self, which is irreconcilable with the inner or "ugly" one. Her quest for social integration causes her to relinquish some aspects of selfhood identity which might not be accepted by social norms and convention.

A contemporary with Plath, Adrienne Rich describes her own situation, which corresponds to Plath's:

To be "like other women" had been a problem for me. From the age of thirteen or fourteen I had felt I was only acting the part of feminine creature. At the age of sixteen my fingers were almost constantly ink-stained. The lipstick and high heels of the era were difficult-to-manage disguises. In 1945 I was writing poetry seriously, and had a fantasy of going to postwar Europe as a journalist, sleeping among the ruins in bombed cities, recording the rebirth of civilization after the fall of the Nazis. But also, like every other girl I knew, I spent hours trying to apply lipstick more adroitly, straitening the wandering seams of stockings, talking about "boys." There were two different compartments already in my life. But writing poetry and fantasies, seemed more real to me; I felt that as an incipient "real woman" I was a fake. Particularly

was I paralyzed when I encountered young children. I thought that I was truly "feminine;" a child, I suspect, could see through me like a shot. This sense of acting a part created a curious sense of guilt, even though it was a part demanded for survival. (Of Woman Born 25)

Rich's desire for self-assertion and her difficulty in being like other women echo Plath's "I am I." Like Plath before her, Rich suffers from self-division, seeing herself divided into "Two different compartments." Both Plath and Rich, who find themselves first in a social enclosure, have to play a double role, hiding their "real" selves underneath the social ones.

Plath's life dramatizes this tension between the inner and superficial selves. The former is full of potential, vitality, creative imagination, and thereby appears dangerous and inimical to a male-dominated society. The latter, on the other hand, is pleasing, submissive, and consequently socially-acceptable. Thus, Jean Shinoda Bolen argues from the perspective of archetypal psychology, "I see every woman as a 'woman-in-between': acting on from within by goddess archetypes and from without by cultural stereotypes" (4). But to what extent, asks Plath in her "Diary Supplement," could she claim herself as "I am I"? In The Bell Jar, Plath expresses through the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, her fear of a disintegrated condition of life:

I saw myself branching out before me like the green fig tree...
From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful
future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy
home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and

another fig was a brilliant professor, and another was E Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig....., and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and everyone of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (80)

Conscious of the conflicting roles she aspires to play, Esther nonetheless hesitates to make a selection for herself since "choosing one meant losing all the rest." Her desire for self-integration, however, is doomed amid the fragmentation of life as she witnesses the figs which represent her future goals turn black and fall on the ground.

Like the protagonist in The Bell Jar, Plath throughout her life attempts to integrate different but conflicting roles she desires to play. Her poetic ambition conflicts with social convention which regards poetry as a legacy inherited by men. Hence, Gilbert and Gubar say: "the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). Since the pen is metaphorically considered as a penis, a symbol of male power, a woman who "attempts the pen" is thus "an intrusive and presumptuous Creature" (8). In The White Goddess, Graves also argues, "woman is not a poet: she is a Muse or she is nothing" (446). While a man is a legitimate author, a

woman is simply an inspiration, an object of men's dreams and creative activity.

Plath's situation is further complicated as she also yearns for "a husband and a happy home and children." The protagonist of The Bell Jar reveals her anxieties that marriage and motherhood will interfere with her writing career:

I also remember Buddy Willard saying in a sinister way that after I had children I would feel differently. I wouldn't want to write poems any more. So I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed and afterwards you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state. (104)

While Plath's protagonist expresses her fear of being trapped by marriage and motherhood, Lynda K. Bundtzen insists that the poet "feared cutting herself off from what she saw as the 'normal' experiences of womanhood-- marriage, home, and most important, children" (21). Plath writes to her mother while studying at Cambridge, "Don't worry that I'm a 'career woman' either. I sometimes think that I might get married just to have children if I don't meet someone in these two years" (LH 208). Like Esther Greenwood, Plath desires to accommodate both her personal aspirations and social expectations. "I am definitely meant," she also writes, "to be married and have children and a home and write like these women I admire: Mrs. Moore, Jean Stafford, Hortense Calisher, Phyllis McGinley" (LH 108). In marrying Ted Hughes, Plath apparently integrates her writing with homemaking since "here," Butscher says, "was a person with whom she could live as a wife and

coexist as a fellow writer" (184). Plath writes to her mother about her future prospects: "I am a woman and glad of it, and my songs will be of fertility of the earth and the people in it through waste, sorrow and death. I shall be a woman singer, and Ted and I shall make a fine life together" (LH 277).

Plath's attempt to accommodate both the self and the others, however, is destined to failure and disappointment. As "a woman of the house," Plath also becomes her "husband's secretary" in her writing career. When her husband publishes his first volume of poetry, she excitedly says, "I am more happy than if it was my book published! I have worked so closely on these poems of Ted's and typed them so many countless times through revision and revision that I feel ecstatic about it all. I am happy his book is accepted first...I can rejoice, then, much more, knowing Ted is ahead of me" (LH 297). While her husband's writing progresses, Plath, Bassnett argues, is 'reduced' to be "his hand" and known only as "Ted's wife" (93). As her husband is away from home and writes at his friend's apartment, Plath stays at home, doing her housework, taking care of their children, and trying to write (102). Though Plath obviously puts priority to domestic work, she begins to resent a burden of motherhood: "I really hunger for a study of my own out of hearing of the nursery when I could be alone with my thoughts for a few hours a day" (LH 392). Plath's restlessness and frustration results from her realization that her life is beyond control and fails to fulfill her personal demands. The tension between outward obligation and inward responsibility seems to culminate in the collapse of her marriage. She says after her separation from her husband, "now I've got rid of Ted, to whom I've dedicated such time and energy and for such

reward, I feel my life and career can really begin" (Bundtzen 27). Plath's statement reveals a new beginning of her life and poetry. She is henceforth on the road toward her self recovery and transformation.

The Lost Paradise

Many poems in Plath's The Colossus (1956-60) dramatize the female protagonist seeking the "lost otherworld." The protagonist usually resigns from the surrounding world and returns to the original unity of the childhood world. The protagonist's attempt to rediscover the lost paradise, however, is doomed to failure, leaving her a sense of emptiness and nothingness.

In "Hardcastle Crag" (CP 63), the liquid landscape--the sea of grasses--is first presented, but lost. The world turns into stone and iron:

All the night gave her in return
 For the paltry gift of her bulk and the beat
 Of her heart, was the humped indifferent iron
 Of its hills, and its pastures bordered by black stone set
 On black stone.

In this harsh, indifferent environment, the protagonist finds herself insecure and vulnerable. She "turned back," trying to escape before "the weight/ Of the stones and hills of stones could break/ Her down to mere quartz grit." The stone threatens to dehumanize her and reduce her in size and in importance. The poem also suggests a woman's situation in a male-dominated society. In Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction, Annis Pratt

argues that a woman who enters the social enclosure "grows down" rather than "grows up": she is reduced to be "submissive, dependent, and 'nonadult' " (18). Her exercise of intellect and erotic imagination is also checked by society which petrifies or fixes her into a type. She is doomed to be classified, "to be like other women," as Rich puts it.

In "Dream with Clam-Diggers" (CP 43-44), the protagonist is exiled to "her early sea-town home" after her "tedious pilgrimage." The green-world of her childhood is portrayed as a paradise on earth:

High against heaven, gulls went wheeling soundless
Over tidal-flats where three children played
Silent and shining on a green rock bedded in mud,
Their fabulous heyday endless.

The poet not only enjoys the earthly paradise but also experiences a mystical moment of timeless eternity since the "fabulous heyday" appears to her "endless." The mystical return to the original unity is illustrated by the poet's rediscovery of the childhood innocence which has been lost or impaired as she enters the social world. For a woman, this immanent type of mystical experience also has a psychological value. The green-world is taken as a refuge from society where the protagonist is "Scathed, [and] stained." This therapeutic value of regression is also noted in Pratt's Archetypal Patterns: "Vision of her world within the natural world, or naturalistic epiphanies, channel the young girl's protests into a fantasy where her imprisoned energies can be released" (17). Even in this world of innocence, peace, and blissful happiness illustrated in the poem, death and evil are lurking. The protagonist's intrusion into the green-world offends

some clam-diggers who "In wait amid snarled weed and wrack of wave/ To trap this wayward girl at her first move of love,/ Now with stake and pitchfork they advance, flint eyes fixed on murder." Like the woman in "Hardcastle Crag," the girl is conscious of her own vulnerability. Still alienated from nature, she cannot claim the green-world as her own. The poet's sense of lack and emptiness lingers on as the paradise is finally lost and the attempt to return is a doomed pilgrimage.

"Suicide Off Egg Rock" (CP 115) portrays the protagonist in a wasteland environment: "Gas tanks, factory stacks--the landscape/ Of imperfections his bowels were part of." The scene provides him neither comfort nor refuge. The "Sun struck the water like a damnation./ No pit of shadow to crawl into." Aware that he is a part of the "landscape of imperfections," the protagonist struggles to separate himself from the surrounding world as he repetitively says, "I am, I am, I am." Like the woman in "Hardcastle Crag," the man also suffers from blankness and emptiness: "The words in his book wormed off the pages./ Everything glittered like a blank page." The protagonist finally prefers death to life: "He heard when he walked into the water/ The forgetful surf on those ledges." If death appears threatening to the girl in "Dream with Clam-Diggers," it is desirable in this poem. The protagonist's immersion into the water is a means of transcendence, a rebirth into a better world.

"The Ghost's Leavetaking" (CP 90-91) begins with a moment of illumination when darkness and daylight, dream and reality are met. A more meaningful world is revealed to the poet, causing a change in her perception of the "mundane world." The poet thus says, "At this joint

between two worlds and two entirely/ Incompatible modes of time, the raw material/ Of our meat-and-potato thoughts assumes the nimbus/ Of ambrosial revelation." However, the dream world, from which the "ghost of our mother and father" emerges, is soon to depart, leaving the poet only with the "profane grail" in her "dreaming skull." It is the spirit of the ghost and the dream world which represent the reality to the poet.

The Realm of the Father

Related to the theme of loss and exile is the poet's desire for a fulfilled relationship with her father and husband. The poems addressed to these male figures illustrate the poet's sense of her selfhood identity in connection with men. Many of these poems fall into a category of love poems which also have some mystical dimensions. The poet's relation with her father-husband-god replicates, in a sense, the mystic's relation with the Divine. In other words, God appears to the mystic as a creative, inspirational force in just the same way as do the male figures of several poems who function as male Muses to the poet. Thus, in Mysticism, Underhill claims that poets are among the "initiates of beauty or of wisdom" who share in some degree the experience of illumination with the mystic, the "initiate of love" (233). Besides, the mystic shares with the poet an artistic medium to express the experience of illumination. As Underhill says, "When essential goodness, truth, and beauty--Light, Life, and Love--are apprehended by the heart, whether the heart be that of the poet, painter, lover, or saint, that

apprehension can only be communicated in a living, that is to say, an artistic form" (239).

The presence of God which fills the mystic with joy and illumination and His absence which signifies the mystic's moment of suffering and agony are analogous to an experience of falling in love. In Women, Love, and Power: Literary and Psychoanalytic Perspectives, Elaine Hoffman Baruch describes a lover's syndrome in a courtly love tradition which bears some similarities to the mystic's relation to God as the love object:

Among the symptoms codified in the Middle Ages and still with us are loss of appetite and the sleepless nights, timidity, anxiety, fear, trembling, disdain for ordinary pleasures, such as worldly goods, or ordinary pains, such as heat or cold. This is followed by a rush of excitement, the thrill of seeing the world through "rose-colored glasses," should the beloved deign to recognize the existence of the plaintiff. (52)

The lover's lost sight of the beloved thus corresponds to the mystical stage of purgation, a dark moment of suffering and torment, while the revelation of the beloved which fills the lover with joy and happiness corresponds to the illumination, a momentary change in a perception of the world.

Many poems about the father dramatize the poet's painful agony and suffering caused by his absence, her resentment toward his betrayal of love, and her unfulfilled attempt to rediscover his lost image and, consequently, a meaningful relation with him.

In "On the Decline of Oracles" (CP 78), the father appears as the poet's Muse, a source of her inspiration and meaning. Thus, his death signifies a

dark moment, the lack of her poetic imagination. Her "vision" is "worthless" and her "eyes gone dull." Like the mystic who loses sight of God, the poet suffers from nothingness after the death of her father. The father, she laments, wills "his books and shell away," leaving her no hope to establish a contact with him. However, she says, "But I, I keep the voices he/ Set in my ear, and in my eye/ The sight of those blue, unseen waves." The lines suggest the poet's obsession with her father. The father figure, the poet struggles to exorcise in her late poems is here portrayed as a powerful god who dominates her psyche.

In "Full Fathom Five" (CP 92), the poet has a vision of her father-god emerging from the deep sea. The title of the poem is taken from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's The Tempest: "Full fathom five thy Father lies." The song is about death and transformation by water. After his death by drowning, the father is mystically transformed and becomes one with nature: "Those are the pearls," sings Ariel, "that were his eyes." In the poem, the father's "white hair, white beard" are identified with white foam of the sea. Although Plath has not yet created her own myth, she appropriates in this poem the "old myth" of the father in Shakespeare's play. "Rather than being embedded forever in the fixed form of statuary, the father," Jon Rosenblatt notes, "is carried by the tides before the daughter's ceaselessly, loving eyes" (70). The daughter, who is "Exiled to no good," wishes her own death to unite with her father: "Father, this thick air is murderous./ I would breath water." As in "Suicide Off Egg Rock," the protagonist seeks the freedom of death, a liberation from her painful existence to a new mode of life which is perfect and whole.

In "Electra on Azalea Path," (CP 116-17) the absence of the father is once more the cause of the daughter's death-in-life existence:

The day you died I went into the dirt,
 Into the lightless hibernaculum
 Where bees, striped black and gold, steep out the blizzard
 Like hieratic stones, and the ground is hard.

This is the purgatory, a preliminary stage before union. The protagonist shuts herself off from the world and enters the "lightless hibernaculum" where bees, the insects intimately associated with her father, "sleep out." In this dreamlike world of forgetfulness, she is then reborn as pure and innocent: "I came/ God fathered....I had nothing to do with guilt or anything." Falling then to the world of reality, she finds that her father is not a god and "died like any man." The daughter, as a guilt-ridden Electra, also discovers that she is the cause of her father's death:

O Pardon the one who knocks for pardon at
 Your gate, father--your hound--bitch, daughter, friend.
 It was my love that did us both to death.

The paradise is thus lost by the fall into sin and murder. Again, the daughter's self-annihilation is a means of transcendence, a return to reconcile and reunite with the father.

In "The Beekeeper's Daughter" (CP118), the desired mystical union is not only unfulfilled but also degenerated into a master-slave relation. The father is portrayed as an authoritative, domineering figure, a "maestro of the bees." The poet imagines herself as a queen bee, the object of the father's attention. Thus, she says, "Kneeling down/ I set my eye to a hole-mouth

and meet an eye/ Round, green, disconsolate as a tear." The pun between "I" and "eye" combines the protagonist with the queen bee; the protagonist sees her own reflection in the eye of the queen bee. As the bees have been helplessly imprisoned in the "many-breasted hives," so has the persona been living under her father's brutality. "My heart," she says, "under your foot, sister of a stone." While the girl in "Hardcastle Crag" "turned back" before she is reduced to "a mere quartz grit," the daughter in the poem who has fallen a victim of the father's rigid authority helplessly turns into "a stone." The daughter thus reveals her ambivalence toward her father:

Father, bridegroom, in this Easter egg
Under the coronal of sugar roses

The queen bee marries the winter of your year.

Although the queen bee persona is a consort of her father-maestro, she is also an agent of his death. The lines remind us of "Lament," in which the poet mourns, "The string of bees took away my father." Unlike the daughter in "Lament," the beekeeper's daughter reveals that her desire to unite with the father is as great as her desire to kill him. Thus, the daughter's suicidal act, suggested by the last line, is a form of her self punishment as well as a means to reconcile and reunite with her ghostly father.

In "The Colossus" (CP 129-30), the poet attempts to reconstruct the broken image of her father. Rosenblatt interestingly notes that "the poem dramatizes a version of the pygmalion story: the daughter wishes to bring her father's statue back to life" (57). However, what is at issue here is that the daughter, who attempts a role reversal by playing a god to her father, fails to resurrect his image. The failure might indicate a problem underlying

the relationship between man and woman, between the female poet and her male Muse. That is, a man must be the creator, not the created--the subject, not the object. The daughter is conscious of her failure and inadequacy as she says at the very beginning of the poem, "I shall never get you put together entirely,/ Pierced, glued, and properly jointed." Unable to reconstruct the broken image of the father, the poet experiences loss and emptiness: "My hours are married to shadow./ No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel/ On the blank stones of the landing." Like the beekeeper's daughter, the daughter in "The Colossus" has a love-hate relationship with her father. A part of her self wants to reject him. His "oracles," says the poet, reveal nothing but "Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles" which are "worse than a barnyard." She is also aware of the futility of her task: "Thirty years now I have labored/ I am none the wiser." And yet she is helpless to extricate herself from his hold. The other part of the self betrays her as a devoted, worshipful suppliant:

I crawl like an ant in morning
Over the weedy acres of your brow
To mend the immense skull-plates and clear
The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

This tension between love and hate, dependence and freedom will be solved in late poems in which the poet abandons altogether her relationship with the father.

If the absence of the father-god causes the poet a sense of loss and emptiness, her rediscovery of the father figure in the image of her husband brings about joy and happiness. Plath's relationship with her husband

illustrates an immanent type of mysticism. The poet regards her husband, with whom she seeks a meaningful relationship, both sexual and spiritual, as a god-substitute. In "Christian Imagery in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath," Nancy D. Hargrove notes that Christianity "did not play a large role in the life of Sylvia Plath" (9). The poet, who writes in her journal that "you God, whom I invoke without belief, only I can choose, and I am responsible" and that "the belief in a moral God structured universe [is] not there," Hargrove argues, "seems largely to have rejected Christianity and Church" (9). Among those she turns to as god-substitutes, namely, her writing, psychiatrists, astrology, magic, and fortune telling, the poet includes her husband, Ted Hughes (9). Besides, Plath regards her husband not only as a father-substitute but also as her male Muse. She writes in Letters Home, "Ted is very strictly disciplinary about my study and work" (290), "educating me daily, setting me exercise of concentration and observation"(267), and finally he "fills somehow the huge sad hole I felt in having no father" (289).

Plath's "Wreath for a Bridal" (CP 44) presents an earthly paradise where a married couple, compared to Adam and Eve, "Couched daylong in cloister of stinging nettle." Their marriage is not sanctioned by God but by nature:

What though green leaves only witness
Such pact as is made once only; what matter
That owl voice sole "yes," while cows utter
Low moos of approve;...

Sexual relations are also described in a mystical term: the merging of the two equal beings into one. The line, "This pair seek single state from that

dual battle" replicates the mystic's "dueling" with God which culminates in a perfect union of oneness. The ecstatic heat from the sexual battling, as the poet says, "bedded like angels, two burn one in fever," is analogous to the heat which occurs when the mystic is possessed by the Divine. A mystic, Richard Rolle, describes the heat which occurs when he turns "his desire and the soul to the Divine": "Heat soothly I call when the mind truly is kindled in Love Everlasting, and the heart on the same manner to burn not hopefully but verily is felt. The heart truly turned into fire, gives feeling of burning love" (Underhill 193). The marriage in the poem also combines procreation with creation, revealing the poet's attempt to integrate her two creative roles of motherhood and poetry writing:

From this holy day on, all pollen blown
 Shall strew broadcast so rare a seed on wind
 That every breath, thus teeming, set the land
 Sprouting fruit, flowers, children most fair in legion
 To slay spawn of dragon's teeth: speaking this promise,
 Let flesh be knit, and each step hence go famous.

The role Plath initially chooses to play is "a woman singer," the one which integrates her feminine roles as a wife and mother with her poetic ambition.

However, Plath's vision of a perfect union in "Wreath for a Bridal" is replaced, in "Epitaph for Flower and Fire" (CP 45-46), by a sense of insecurities and impending disaster toward her love:

You might as well haul up
 This wave's green peak on wire
 To prevent fall, or anchor the fluent air

In quartz, as crack your skull to keep
 These two most perishable lovers from the touch
 That will kindle angels' envy, scorch and drop
 Their fond hearts charred as any match.

The poet questions the immortality of love and the eternal happiness of the lovers. The stanza echoes Poe's "Annabel Lee," in which a lover's death is caused by "angels' envy." Hence, the paradise will not be forever enjoyed by the lovers. As "Stars shoot their petals, and suns run to seed," so love, "No matter how fiercely lit," transforms into something else. Love cannot transcend the flux of time, the destruction of nature. Inherent in the poem is, therefore, the poet's sense of nothingness and meaninglessness.

In many poems, the failure of the lovers to reach the mystic's goal of union is, however, caused by the inequality of the sexes. The exemplary love between the mystic and God is a space of freedom which transcends the boundaries between I and Thou, the self and the other. Hence, the mystic claims not only that he and God become One but also that the self lost and found again in God is more perfect and whole. The issue here is that the cultural inequalities in the sexes prevent this kind of love from taking place. Love as revealed in the hierarchical context is fixation rather than transcendence, dependence rather than freedom.

In "Ode for Ted" (CP 29), the husband figure is seen as an authoritative god who names animals and plants. His guardianship of nature is described in terms of a master-slave relationship. He tames the wild nature which yields under his "boot," the symbol of authority which

links the husband with the tyrannical father in Plath's late poems. Like nature, the poet appears passive and submissive to her Adam-like husband:

Ringdoves roost well within his wood,
 shirr songs to suit which mood
 he saunters in; how but most glad
 could be this adam's woman
 when all earth his words do summon
 leaps to laud such man's blood!

The husband thus controls both nature and woman. The poet effaces her identity and cheerfully accepts her inferior position as Adam's woman, an appendage to his greatness and power. Overwhelmed by love, the poet thus loses her self--never to find it again. Love, illustrated by Plath, reduces rather than enhances the self-growth and development of her identity.

In "Pursuit" (CP 22), the poet regards herself as a helpless victim haunted by her panther-lover:

I hurl my heart to halt his pace,
 To quench his thirst I squander blood;
 He eats, and still his need seeks food,
 Compel a total sacrifice

The poet's description of love as a mode of "sacrifice" recalls a mystic's entire yielding of the self to God. While the mystic loses and finds herself in the image of God, the protagonist's self-effacement is fixed. We have noted that the mystic transcends the self and acts in the name of God, who endows her with power and sureness. In the poem, the protagonist's powerlessness in relation to her powerful and domineering lover causes her a total despair.

In the end, the protagonist escapes into the "tower of my fears": "I shut the door on that dark guilt,/ I bolt the door, each door I bolt." Describing the background of the poem, Judith Kroll says:

Clearly she [Plath] perceived her husband as (to use Sontag's words) "an all-powerful, hypnotic leader figure or force"...; and too, he suggested to her a glamorous symbol of death.

The protagonist of the poem is lured by the beauty, strength, and power of the panther, a symbol of death and love. She detaches from herself and concentrates her attention on the male figure whose power she glorifies and celebrates: "His greed has set the world aflame,/ He prowls more lordly than the sun./ Most soft, most suavely glides that step,/ Advancing always at my back."

The persona's self-assertion and rebellious challenge against her lover's authority are illustrated in such poems as "The Snowman on the Moor" and "The Shriek." In these two poems, the other side of the self which has been formerly buried threatens to break away, causing the protagonist to feel restless and dissatisfied. The response to the inner call of the self, according to Underhill, is a prerequisite to the awakening:

In many conversions to the mystic life, the revelation of an external splendour, the shining vision of the transcendent spiritual world, is wholly absent. The self awakens to that which is within, rather than to that which is without: to the immanent not the transcendent God, to the personal not the cosmic relation. (196)

This immanent type of mystical experience is illustrated by several poems in The Colossus, which anticipates change and transformation of the self in the late poems.

"The Snowman on the Moor" (CP 58-59) dramatizes a domestic quarrel. The wife who appears in other poems as cheerful and submissive is now rebellious to her husband. She "Flung from a room" and "in fury left him." The protagonist confronts her husband, demanding him, "Come find me" though "[he] did not come." Her bold self-assertion and defiance, however, are checked by a "grisly-thewed,/ Austere, corpse-white/ Giant" emerging from the snow white moor. As in "Epitaph for Fire and Flower," nature appears hostile to the poet. The vision of the giant which guards against a rebellious girl might be regarded as a projection of the poet's shadow. In "Spinning Among Fields: Jung, Frye, Levi-Struss and Feminist Archetypal Theory," Annis Pratt argues that a woman's shadow is social conforming which causes her to feel guilt ridden should she rebel against social constrictions (103). Thus, the persona describes her vision:

....[she] saw dangling from that spike-studded belt

Ladies' sheaved skulls:

Mournfully the dry tongues clacked their guilt:

"Our wit made fools

Of kings, unmanned kings' sons: our masteries

Amuses court halls:

For that brag, we barnacle these iron thighs."

The young wife realizes that her self-assertion is in conflict with society and thereby must be suppressed to avoid social punishment. She, consequently, "bent homeward, brimful of gentle talk/ And mild obeying."

The "envious bride" in "The Shrike" (CP 42) reveals her resentment toward her domestic position. While society allows freedom for men to "come and go," women are placed in the household. Thus, the husband in the poem enjoys his "royal dream" which lifts him "apart/ From his earth-wife's side" whereas the wife is locked in her "skull's cage." The image of imprisonment and suffocation links the poem with "Suicide off Egg Rock" and "Full Fathom Five," which deal with claustrophobic environment. As in "Pursuit," the protagonist reveals the dark side of her self, which is powerful but violent and destructive. She transforms herself into a ravenous bird and eats "Crowns, palace, all/ That nightlong stole her male." The image of the bird of prey foreshadows Plath's "Lady Lazarus," in which a phoenix bird is born "out of ash" to eat men like air.

The Return to the Mother

Although the poems in The Colossus are predominantly about the poet's relationship with the male figures, especially her father and husband, many poems also deal with the poet's relationship with the spirit of the Mother--be it rather a Muse or the feminine aspect of the self than the poet's real mother. If the sense of loss and emptiness, anger and resentment caused by the unfulfilled relationship dominate the poems about father and husband, it is the poet's ambivalence, her desire to unite and her fear of

engulfment, which characterizes the poems about the Mother. The poet's final resolve to reconcile and reunite with the Mother marks the moment of awakening since it signifies change from her feminine roles and her social obligations to her personal responsibility. The spirit of the Mother, consequently, has the mystical and psychological import. The union with the Mother which brings about wholeness and fulfillment is also the union with the feminine aspect of the self, which has been lost during the protagonist's development into the social world.

In "Point Shirley" (CP 110), the poet escapes into the scene of childhood, to her grandmother's house. Seeking a legacy of her grandmother, the poet is disappointed because her grandmother's "labor of love" is now lost: Death, an agent of nature, takes away her grandmother while the "sluttish, rutted sea" ravages her grandmother's house. Trying to establish contact with her grandmother, the poet says:

I would get from these dry-capped stones
The milk your love instilled in them.
The black ducks dive.

The lines suggest the poet's death-wish. The search for the grandmother's milk "instilled" in nature requires her to join with nature itself. The mystical immersion into the "black sea" is a means to transcend her feeling of loss and emptiness. Only through death does the persona ever hope to reunite with the spirit of her grandmother.

In "All the Dead Dears" (CP 70-71), the spirit of the Mother, which is lost in "Point Shirley," emerges from the mystic water: "Mother, grandmother, greatgrandmother/ Reach hag hands to haul me in,/ And an

image looms under the fishpond surface/ Where the daft father went down." The mystical union in the flow of water is psychologically involved since it is also the merging between the conscious or the static masculine represented by the "daft father" and the unconscious or the dynamic feminine represented by the spirit of Mother. The poet's desire to reject is as much as her desire to unite with the spirit of Mother. She finally confesses: "This lady here's no kin/ Of mine,/ yet kin she is: she'll suck/ Blood and whistle my marrow clean/ To prove it." The Mother, who emerges to claim kinship with the poet, is obviously a devouring Mother. The return to her is thus a dangerous enterprise which involves a violent death followed by a rebirth.

"The Disquieting Muses" (CP 74-76) reveals the tension between the inner and superficial selves. The superficial self is represented by the protagonist's real mother, who insists on the daughter's social accomplishments. The inner self is represented by the "Godmothers," who rise from the daughter's dark psyche by night. The daughter then rejects her mother in favor of the Godmother Muses: "I learned, I learned, I learned elsewhere,/ From muses unhired by you, dear mother." Although the unconscious self, which has been in "shadow," is surfacing and recognized by the protagonist, it is still alien to the poet. Accordingly, Susan Juhasz argues that the fairy tale myth used by the poet "externalizes elements from her own psyche, her poetic impulses or her vision, into three ladies three fairies, three disquieting muses" (95). Moreover, the image of the Muses which "send their vigil in gown of stone" appears threatening to the poet since the blankness and emptiness of stone also suggest death.

The persona's ambivalence, which causes her tension in "All the Dead Dears" and in "The Disquieting Muses," is finally resolved in "Lorelei" (CP 94-95). In this poem, the image of the mystic creatures "with hair heavier/ Than sculpted marble" rises from black water to claim a sisterhood with the protagonist. The creatures "sing/ Of a world more full and clear/ Than can be" and derange "by harmony/ Beyond the mundane order." Their song lures the protagonist, who has been seeking the lost world of perfection, to her death:

O river, I see drifting
 Deep in your flux of silver
 Those great goddesses of peace.
 Stone, stone, ferry me down there.

The protagonist seeks perfection through death. Therefore, her fear of blankness and emptiness of stone, and, consequently, of death no longer appears.

Plath's series of poems, "Poem for a Birthday" (CP 131-37) might be read as a sequel of "Lorelei." As its title suggests, the series dramatizes the gestation in the womb and the rebirth. The protagonist thus claims, "I am becoming another." In Rites and Symbols of Initiation, Mircea Eliade argues that the second birth, which is a spiritual one, requires an initiate to return to the womb, to the beginning of life:

He abolishes his biological existence, the years of his human life that have already passed, in order to return to a situation that is at once embryonic and primordial; he "goes back" to the state of

semen, that is, of pure virtuality. This theme of going in order to abolish the historical duration that has already elapsed and to begin a new life, with all its possibilities intact, has so obsessed humanity that we find it in a great many contexts and even in highly developed soteriologies and mysticism. (155)

Unlike the poems we have so far discussed, "Poem for a Birthday" reveals the protagonist's successful return to the original stage and her emergence as a fulfilled and pure being. The paradise is therefore regained by her return to and reconciliation with the Mother. Since the second birth is also spiritual, the protagonist not only fears death but welcomes it. In "Who," the first poem in the series the protagonist says, "Mother of otherness/ Eat me." She then represents herself as a foetus in the womb. There, in "a mummy's stomach" the persona finds "Old tools, handles and rusty tusks"; the stage of the beginning is thus "at once embryonic and primordial," as Eliade puts it. In "The Beast," the persona calls herself "Duchess of Nothing" who "marries a cupboard of rubbish" which suggests her unfulfilled relation with her lovers, both father and husband. Consequently, in "Stones," she reconciles and unites with the spirit of Mother. "The mother of pestles," she says, "diminished me./ I become a still pebble." The line suggests the purgatory stage: stripped her superficial self, the persona appears "diminished." If the stone is formerly an object of the poet's dread and fear, she is now transformed into it. The poet and the Mother, who is usually described as a stony image, become one. Unlike the persona's relationship with the father-husband, her relationship with the Mother is fulfilled and she reappears "[as] good as new." In his "Notes on the

chronological order of Sylvia Plath's poems," Ted Hughes argues that "The Stones," the last poem of the series is "the first eruption of the voice that produced Ariel" and that the whole series signifies the "end of the first phase of [Plath's] development" (192). Hughes adds, "When she consolidated her hold on the second phase, two years later, she dismissed everything prior to "The Stones" as Juvenilia, produced in the day before she became herself" (192).

CHAPTER SIX: VOYAGE IN

I amaze myself. It is my work that does it, my sense of myself as a writer...Living apart from Ted is wonderful--I am no longer in his shadow, and it is heaven to be liked for myself alone, knowing what I want. (Letters Home 478-79)

In Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, Carol Christ argues that "mystic insight" is probably easier for women than for men to achieve because women's powerlessness and inferior position in patriarchy are intimately related to the mystic's experience of nothingness. Indeed, Plath has already revealed in many poems in The Colossus her "mystic insight" which projects on her conscious mind a sense of personal inadequacy or loss in a hostile and indifferent environment and a transcendental vision of the lost paradise of perfection and union. The protagonist of the early poems outwardly searches for a perfect union with men which turns out to be disappointing and unfulfilling. In "Poem for a Birthday," the poet sees herself thrust into the new world, "the city where men are mended," and also sets the beginning of a new road which leads her to reunite and reconcile with the spirit of Mother, the archetype which represents the unconscious reality buried below the threshold of patriarchal consciousness. The return to the Mother thus takes the poet to the Underworld, to the depth of her inner self, and there she meets with her naked eyes the other side of her self, or the "Mother of otherness" as Plath puts it.

Purification

In Mysticism, Underhill argues that the very first step the self must take on the road toward Reality is purification, the cleansing of all illusions and disguises which are not in harmony with the perceived Reality. According to Underhill, this process of the "character adjustment" to Reality consists of two aspects:

- (1) The Negative aspect, the stripping or purging away of those superfluous, unreal, and harmful things which dissipate the precious energies of the self. This is the business of Poverty.
- (2) The Positive aspect: a raising to their highest terms, their purest state, of all that remains--the permanent elements of character.

This is brought about by *Mortification*, the gymnastic of the soul: a deliberate recourse to painful experiences and difficult tasks. (205)

The two types of purification share the same goal--the orientation of the mind to Reality. It must be emphasized that purification, according to Underhill, is a life long process, an ordeal endured by the mystic who is sustained only by his transcendental vision of the perfect Reality he is yearning for.

These two aspects of purgation described by Underhill are found in Plath's late poems which appear in her three volumes, Ariel, Crossing the Water, Winter Trees, written between 1960-1963. Many of Plath's late poems are the re-vision of her early poems in The Colossus. Instead of seeking connection and reconciliation as seen in early poems, the protagonist of the late poems yearns for detachment and renunciation.

According to Underhill, the poverty advocated by the mystic is a mental rather than a material state because the true rule of poverty is to get rid of those which enchain the self and thereby prevent it from achieving the ultimate goal of Reality (211). Hence, poverty for the mystic paradoxically means the richness of the soul: "That thou mayst have pleasure in everything, seek pleasure in nothing. That thou mayst know everything, seek to know nothing. That thou mayest possess all things, seek to possess nothing" (206). "Poverty, then," says Underhill, "consists in a breaking down of man's inveterate habit of trying to rest in, or take seriously, things which are 'less than God': *i.e.*, which do not possess the character of reality" (210). Psychologically considered, this stripping away of the false mask which alienates the self from Reality is also the very first step toward individuation:

One of the first necessities on the road to personality is to depart from the Persona, to detach oneself from it as clearly as possible, to strive to achieve a harmony of the inner and outer life and to be to the outside world what one is within. (121 Goldbrunner)

The mystic's adjustment of the self to Reality by stripping away all kinds of disguises and illusions is a major theme in Plath's "Mirrors," "Face Lift," "Tulip," and "In Plaster."

In "Mirror" (CP 173-74), the speaker is the mirror which reflects nothing but reality: "Whatever I see I swallow immediately/ Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike." In Underhill's Mysticism, the self is also compared to a mirror (198-220). The mirror self which has not been cleansed projects the false image of the universe. What man sees is thus a

reflection of what he is. The self covered by the rust of illusion, therefore, must be cleansed to allow the divine light of reality to shine upon. In the second stanza of the poem, the mirror turns into "a lake," and "A woman," says the mirror persona, "bends over me,/ Searching my reaches for what she really is." The mirror persona then describes the woman's first encounter with reality:

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands
I am important to her. She comes and goes
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Although Plath uses the narcissus myth to deal with the theme of self-discovery, the woman's confrontation with Reality is more successfully explained by the Jungian notion of individuation. Jung describes, in "The Principles Archetypes," the self as consisting of various aspects. The first is the persona, a mask which hides our true self. Beneath the persona are the Shadow (dark aspects of the self that we reject), the anima (the feminine aspect in the male subject) or the animus (the masculine counterpart in the female subject), and finally the Spirit symbolized by the wise old man or woman. In another article "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," Jung associates the anima or the feminine aspect with the fish of one's own unconscious:

Whoever looks into the water sees his own image, but behind it
living creatures soon loom up; fishes, presumably...They are water-
beings of a peculiar sort. Sometimes a nixie gets into the

fisherman's net, a female, half-human fish...The nixie is an even more instinctive version of a magical feminine being whom I call the anima. (24-25)

Accordingly, the woman in the poem sees in the mirror of Reality "the darkness" which represents her Shadow, "an old woman" which represents her Spirit, and "a terrible fish" which represents her anima. It is then the anima or the feminine aspect of the self, symbolized by the Great Mother archetype, which represents a part of Reality for the woman in the poem.

"In Plaster" dramatizes the poet's self-division: the false self which is immaculately white and socially perfect, and the inner, yellow self which is "ugly and hairy." The white self has "no personality" but the poet accepts her intimate relation with it: "she [the white self] was shaped just the way I was/ Only much whiter and unbreakable and with no complaints." This is the Sylvia Plath who is outwardly perfect. The white self or the animus-ego is empty of core identity because it is socially oriented to the demands of the others. The false mask which alienates the poet from the Truth or her self-knowledge corresponds to St. Catherine of Genoa's description of the "covering" which estranges the self from the perception of Reality:

...the object cannot respond to the rays of the sun, not because the sun ceases to shine--for it shines without intermission--but because the covering intervenes. Let the covering be destroyed, and again the object be exposed to the sun, and will answer to the rays which beat against it in proportion as the work of destruction advances. (Underhill 202)

Like Catherine, the poet reveals her need of getting rid of the false self, which is a drain on her spirit, a cause of her death-in-life existence: "Living with her [the false self]," says Plath, "was like living with my own coffin." Although the poet "was quite limp" and "wasn't in any position to get rid of her," the last stanza reveals her determination for change which echoes Catherine's statement, "Let the covering be destroyed":

Now I see it must be one or the other of us.

She may be a saint, and I may be ugly and hairy,

But she'll soon find out that doesn't matter a bit.

I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her,

And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me.

This desire to set the self attuned to Reality by rejecting what is not real is required of the person who will undergo the ordeal of purification. Underhill thus says, "It is the inner conviction that this conformity--this transcendence of the unreal--is possible and indeed normal, which upholds the mystic during the terrible years of Purgation" (201)

In "Tulip" the poet yearns for the entire self-obliteration: "I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions./ I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses/ and my history to the anesthetist and my body to the surgeon." This is the selflessness advocated by the mystic: "All those who have felt themselves urged towards the attainment of this transcendental vision," says Underhill, "have found that possessions interrupt the view; that claims, desires, attachments becomes centres of conflicting interest in the mind" (210). In desiring nothing and asking for nothing, the self enjoys its liberation and freedom. And this is the

completion, the final goal of purification. Thus the poet, in her desiring to confront with nothingness, says:

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
 To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
 How free it is, you have no idea how free--
 The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
 And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.

As in "In Plaster," the poet is met with conflict and struggle. The sight of red tulips disturbs her peaceful world of forgetfulness since they remind her of the living existence:

Before they [the tulips] came the air was calm enough,
 Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.
 Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.

The balance, the "coming and going" of the flow of air, the self has enjoyed during a trancelike state of peaceful forgetfulness, is now disrupted because the self is distracted by the sight of the tulips which, as the mystic puts it, "confuse and enchain" her mind. The poet does not have enough courage to execute the complete renunciation her transcendental consciousness is pressing for.

In "Face Lift" (CP 155-56), the poet compares her hospital experience to the cleansing process which also requires her retirement from the outside world:

For five days I lie in secret,
 Tapped like a cask, the years draining into my pillow.
 Even my best friend thinks I'm in the country.

Skin doesn't have roots, it peels away easy as paper.

When I grin, the stitches tauten. I grow backward. I'm twenty.

The lines illustrate what the mystic calls "life-process," the establishment of a certain harmony between the created self and the Reality. The self is peeled away of the superfluous until it is reduced to the ground of being where it receives a charge of new energy. The poet thus becomes young, innocent, and pure again as she declares, "I grow backward." "Old sock-face, sagged on a darning egg," the metonymy of the false self, dies away. The poet then describes her second birth as self-regenerated: "Mother to myself, I wake swaddled in gauze,/ Pink and smooth as baby." Not only is the poet "made in the image of God," assuming his role of creation, but also the idea of self-regeneration is linked with the original state of being, which is androgynous. As Nor Hall points out, "Before the division there was unity. All things of earth and sky have their origin in an androgynous figure capable of autonomous creation" (30). The issue here is that self-regeneration signifies fulfillment, perfection, and wholeness--be it derived from the "marriage" between a person and the Divine Reality, between the masculine and the feminine, or between the anima and the animus.

The second type of purification is defined by Underhill as "Mortification," the death of the old self followed by the emergence of the new life. As poverty is paradoxically meant by the mystic as the richness of the soul, the mystical death is not an end in itself but a means toward a new, perfect life. Hence, the paradox of death is stated by Tauler: "A man might die a thousand deaths in one day and find at once a joyful life corresponding to each of them...The stronger the death the more powerful

and thorough is the corresponding life; the more intimate the death, the more inward is the life" (Underhill 217-18). Like poverty, death is considered by the mystic as a psychological process. The mystic who undergoes the fire of purification is 'dead' to his natural or lower life and participates in the "great life of the All," in the absolute Godhead. Thus, Underhill says:

The death of selfhood in its narrow individualistic sense is, then, the primary object of mortification. All the twisted elements of character which foster the existence of this unreal yet complex creature are to be pruned away. Then, as with the trees of the forest, so with the spirit of man, strong new branches will spring into being, grow toward air and light. (221)

As in poverty, the mystic sees a sharp contrast between the natural self and the divine Reality. The transition to a new mode of existence requires death of the old self. Like poverty, mortification is a self-adjustment, releasing an individual from a narrow and lower nature toward a new level of freedom and power.

Mortification as part of the purifying process is found in many of Plath's late poems. In Chapters in a Mythology, Judith Kroll argues that in Plath's poetry the conflict between the true and false selves is inextricably linked with the theme of death and rebirth:

The motif of false and true selves derives from the heroine's relation to the male figure, from which her true self has been alienated, thus giving rise to a false self. Either the false self or the male (or both) must be killed to allow rebirth of the true self. The

motif of death and rebirth also provides the terms of conflict and resolution in this matter: life lived by the false self is death-in-life, while the rebirth of the true self promises life-in-death, expressed in the poetry in images of purgation, purification, and transcendence. (13)

Death is simply a part of the transformational process toward rebirth. After death, there is a new beginning, a new life which is more perfect and whole.

In "A Birthday Present" (CP 206-08), self-annihilation of the mystic is taken literally by the poet. The birthday present the poet insists on receiving is death. "Can you" asks the poet, "give it to me?/ Do not be ashamed--I do not mind if it is small." The poet apparently does not fear death since her present mode of life is already a death-in-life existence: "If you only knew how the veils were killing my days./ To you they are only transparencies, clear air." "Pain," says Underhill, "the mystics always welcome and often court" (223). So does the poet embrace death as a deliverance toward freedom:

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.

If it were death

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes

I would know you are serious.

There would be a nobility then, there would be a birthday.

The images of death and rebirth are simultaneously present in the poem. As the mystic survives the "divine furnace of purifying love," the poet similarly has a vision of a new life, "a birthday," after her death.

Like "A Birthday Present," "Fever 103" (CP 231-32) deals with the theme of transcendence and rebirth. The poet combines the two aspects of purification: detachment and mortification. Like the mystic whose transcendental consciousness forces upon his conscious mind the ugly and imperfect life, the poet presents here the world of death, sin, and pollution:

Devilish leopard!
Radiation turned it white
And killed it in an hour.

Greasing the bodies of adulterers
Like Hiroshima ash and eating in.
The sin. The sin.

The poet thus rejects the imperfect world, the one where she has lived as a victim of men's brutality:

I am too pure for you or anyone.
Your body
Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern--

My head a moon
Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin
Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive.

The poet extracts from her surrender to the cruelty and injustice of the world the purgation and refinement. She is thus transfigured: her skin is "gold beaten" and "infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive." She possesses both heat and light as she ascends "To Paradise":

I think I am going up,

I think I may rise--

The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I

Am a pure acetylene

Virgin

Attended by roses,

The transmutation of the self into "a pure acetylene" is accompanied by heat. In Rites and Symbols of Initiations, Mircea Eliade argues that heat represents "a sacred force" which occurs when the body is possessed by the divine frenzy (85-87). Not only is the poet's body purged into a pure, formless state, but also the bodily heat which accompanies the process testifies to her participation in a higher condition.

In "Getting There" (CP 247-49), the poet takes the train across the landscape of death. If death brings the poet to unite with a male figure in many early poems, here it releases her from the agony she has suffered in relation to men:

It is Adam's side,

This earth I rise from, and I in agony.

I cannot undo myself, and the train is steaming.

Steaming and breathing, its teeth

Ready to roll, like a devil's.

Although death appears frightening--the train as a vehicle of death is compared to a devouring devil, it is desired by the poet since the journey through death is terminated in rebirth. Heat, movement, and ecstatic frenzy, accompanying this transformation process, signify a change into another order of reality. The poet thus says at the end, "And I, stepping

from this skin/ Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces/ Step to you from the black car of Lethe,/ Pure as a baby." The purging of the self from all kinds of relations and attachments is compared to the state of forgetfulness. The self, after having undergone this purifying process, emerges "Pure as a baby."

Illumination

The Mystic Way described by Underhill is based on the notion of action and reaction--the swing back and forth between pleasure and pain as the soul is moving toward the ultimate goal of union. After the mystic has suffered the ordeal during which all the senses have been cleansed, he enjoys the illumination, the revelation of the Divine. The illuminated state, says Underhill, is characterized as the two-fold vision of the Reality (250-51). The mystic either turns inward to meet God in the ground of the soul or looks outward to apprehend God in the world of creation. The first type is called introversion and the second type extroversion. These two types of mystical experience similarly culminate in the perception of the ultimate Unity. Thus, W.T. Stace says:

[The] extrovertive mystic, using his physical senses, perceives the multiplicity of external material objects...mystically transfigured so that the One, or the Unity shines through them. The introvertive mystic, on the contrary, seeks by deliberately shutting off the senses, by obliterating from his consciousness the entire multiplicity of sensations, images, and thoughts, to plunge into the

depths of his own [self]. There, in that darkness and silence, he alleges that he perceives the One--and is united with it." (61-62)

The introvertive type is then directed to concentration and the extrovertive type to expansion. In fact, Underhill points out that these two-fold descriptions of the illumination are usually found in spiritual accounts of the same mystics, though one type may predominate and the other is subordinate or latent.

The protagonist in Plath's late poems first retires to a secret, unknown place which represents the depth of the soul, and there receives a charge of new energy. This state of retirement and receptivity is also found in the initiation rites and rituals, which also constitute a sort of mystical experience. In The Moon and the Virgin, Nor Hall says:

Initiation rites, which enabled the passage of a person from one life stage to another, often included the first step of incubation in order to ensure the kind of isolation and self-containment that one receptive to the unconscious...

Initiation is an active entry into darkness. It means to "enter into" an experience of psychic significance with one's eyes closed, mouth shut, wearing a veil--a kind of veiling that paradoxically permits seeing. Covering the eyes for a time to an external world permits an inward focusing that tends to draw one's attention "down" and sometimes "backward." (23-24)

Many of Plath's poems use the image of incubation, a return to the womb, to describe the stage of rest before the illumination. In "Wintering" (CP 217-19), a revision of Plath's early bee poems, the "incubation" is

presented as a retirement into a bee hive during winter, the time of death and stagnation. Thus, the speaker says, "This is the easy time, there is nothing to do." Instead of seeking an outward relationship with the father, the speaker describes her "voyage in" to the underworld, to the depth of the soul: "This is the room I have never been in./ This is the room I could never breathe in./ The black bunched in there like a bat,/ No light/ But the torch." The use of bee imagery in the poem is closely associated with ancient rituals. According to Nor Hall, a legend is told about an infant god who went into a "hollowed birth cave" of Zeus-Trophonios, where he was fed and attended by giant bees (25). "In keeping with the bee metaphor," Hall further says, "the initiate was called an *incubant*, from *incubare* or 'to dwell in a hive.' A set of ancient instructions says that the first temple was, like a hive, constructed of bees' wax and birds' feathers: 'Bring feathers, ye birds, and wax, ye bees.' The temple attendants were priestesses called *melissae*, or 'bee maidens' " (26). In the poem, Plath describes the period of incubation as a kind of secret ritual which is exclusively for women: "The bees are all women,/ Maids and the long royal lady./ They have got rid men,/ The blunt, clumsy stumblers, the boors." The speaker, like other "incubants" who dwell in the bee hive is *in via*, since she is waiting for the return of the spring, the time of renewal and rebirth. The speaker finally says, "The bees [the incubants] are flying. They taste the spring."

As in "Wintering," in "Nick and the Candlestick" (CP 240-42), the poet descends into a womblike cave:

I am a miner. The light burns blue.

Waxy stalactites

Drip and thicken, tears
 The earthen womb
 Exudes from its dead boredom.
 Black bat airs

Wrap me, raggy shawls,
 Cold homicides.

The womblike cave, like the bee hive, represents the realm of the Mother. The voyage in is thus a regression to a primordial, origin of life, or to the unconscious self whose contents still contain the cosmic, archaic values. Hence, the poet describes her journey: "And the fish, the fish--/ Christ! they are panes of ice,/ A vice of knives,/ A piranha/ Religion, drinking/ Its first communion out of my live toes." As in the mystical quest, this return to a dark, womblike cave of the Mother is a dangerous travail which requires both courage and strength. All kinds of attachments, including human relations are alien in the realm of the Mother, who claims the poet's entire devotion and worldly sacrifice. As she travels alone into the cave of darkness, the sight of her baby which appears there not only surprises her but also diverts her from the quest. The poet addresses her child, "O Love, how did you get here?/ O embryo/ Remembering, even in sleep,/ Your crossed position." While the speaker of "Wintering" finally has a vision of her rebirth, the protagonist in "Nick", distracted from her inner quest, seeks instead a redemption through her child, who is compared to Christ: "You are the one/ Solid the spaces lean on, envious./ You are the baby in the barn."

The illumination is usually accompanied by a new outlook toward the universe. In other words, once the mystic strips himself of all illusions and disguises which constitute his false self, he perceives himself as a part of the universe, sees God in nature, and participates in His creation. The mystic then achieves to a degree a harmony between the inner and outer life, between the self and the universe. The breaking away from our own self consciousness and personal ego toward the perception of something larger than life during the state of illumination might be explained by Jungian psychology:

The more one becomes aware of oneself through self knowledge and corresponding actions, the more the stratum of the personal unconscious with which the collective unconscious is overlaid will disappear. This gives rise to a consciousness that is no longer enmeshed in the petty personal world of the ego, but shares in the wider world, in the Object. (122 Goldbrunner)

The participation in the "wider world, in the Object" requires our self knowledge. Hence, God tells St. Catherine during her ecstasy, "If thou wilt arrive at a perfect knowledge and enjoyment of Me, the Eternal Truth, thou shouldst never go outside the knowledge of thyself; and by humbling thyself in the valley of humility thou wilt know me and thyself, from which knowledge thou will draw all that is necessary...In self knowledge, then, thou will humble thyself; seeing that, in thyself, thou does not even exist" (Underhill 200). The self ceases to exist because it finally achieves instead the divine identity. However, it should be noted that illumination is an intermediate, not a final state. "The real distinction between the

Illuminative and the Unitive Life," says Underhill, "is that in Illumination the individuality of the subject--however profound his spiritual consciousness, however close his apparent communion with the Infinite--remains separate and intact" (246).

The illuminated state in many late poems illustrates the poet's ecstatic moment, her vision of a balanced perfection, and her identification with the fluid, natural flow. In "The Moon and the Yew Tree" (CP 172-73), the poet identifies herself with the natural force, the Moon Mother:

The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.
Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls
How I would like to believe in tenderness--
The face of the effigy, gentle by candles,
Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

Mary is a religious icon the poet rejects. Mary's holiness seems fake and unreal as the poet questions, "How I would like to believe in tenderness." The effigy of Mary is linked with other saint figures which are "Stiff with holiness." The poet, on the other hand, turns to the dynamic feminine, the Moon Mother, which "drags the sea after it like a dark crime." The issue here is that the poet, who earlier finds nature hostile and indifferent, now incorporates it as an aspect of herself. The poem also illustrates a perfect balance, the darkness of the yew tree which represents the masculine aspect and the whiteness of the Moon which represents the feminine aspect. This is the period of Illumination, during which the self is "conscious of the living reality of the World of Becoming, the vast arena of the Divine Creativity, in which the little individual is immersed...A harmony is thus set

up between the mystic and life in all its forms" (Underhill 258). In the poem, nature is a part of the poet's self and the one with her imagination.

As in "The Moon and the Yew Tree," perfection and balance are illustrated in "Ariel" (CP 239-40). The poem begins with stasis, which is then resolved into motion, corresponding to the poet's transition from the static masculine to the dynamic feminine. The poet describes the moment of illumination characterized by movement, immersion, and ecstasy:

And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.

And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

The lines describe the loss of self into the fluid, volatile flow of nature. The poet and nature become one. The poet finds the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth immanent in nature. She, participating in the eternal flow of nature, dissolves and finds herself again in the physical elements.

Although many late poems illustrate a perfect moment of illumination, some reveal the poet's failure to achieve a balanced perfection. Such poems deal with the terrible rebirth of the feminine deity which is accompanied by uncontrolled violence, revenge, and murder. The poems which diverge from the mystic's ultimate goal of perfect and peaceful harmony provide evidence of the poet's psychic disintegration, the disharmonious relation between conscious and unconscious, animus and anima, and the masculine and the feminine aspects, the dichotomy which, in the mystic, is dissolved and transcends into a perfect union.

"Daddy" (CP 222-24) illustrates the struggle between the masculine and the feminine aspects: the Nazi father and the Jewish mother. The relation between these two aspects is out of balance as it is present in terms of the oppressor and the oppressed. Plath thus says in her BBC broadcast:

The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyse each other--she has to act the awful little allegory before she is free of it.

The persona identifies herself with the mother: "I," the speaker says, "began to talk like a Jew./ I think I may well be a Jew." The whole poem is present as a dramatic ritual or "allegory" created to reactualize the killing of the father since the speaker declares, "Daddy, I have had to kill you. You died before I had time--." The poem is a revision of Plath's early poems about the father-daughter relation. The ritualistic death of the father is an act of

emasculatation performed by the daughter who desires to free herself from the father.

In "Purdah" (CP 242-44), the wife of Plath's early poem, "Ode for Ted," no longer rejoices to be "Adam's side" as she says:

Jade--

Stone of the side,

The agonized

Side of green Adam, I

Smile, cross-legged,

Enigmatical

The wife is the mirror which does not reflect her identity but that of her husband who is "Lord of the mirrors." The speaker then represents her self-transformation to seek revenge and kill: "I shall unloose--/ From the small jeweled/ Doll he guards like a heart--/ The lioness,/ The shriek in the bath,/ The cloak of holes." The lines alludes to the Greek myth. The persona no longer identifies herself with Electra the mourner of the early poems but with Clytemnestra the avenger.

"Lady Lazarus" (CP 244-47) revolves around the mystical theme of death, transformation, and rebirth. As in "Daddy," the speaker identifies herself as a victim:

.....my skin

Bright as Nazi lampshade,

My right foot

A paperweight,
 My face a featureless, fine
 Jew linen.

The speaker wishes her own death to liberate the self from the torture and confinement of the torture. As in Plath's early poems, death is described as a mystic immersion into an undifferentiated flow of water. The speaker describes her attempted suicide: "I rocked shut/ As a seashell./ They had to call and call/ And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls." Death is executed by the speaker's imagination. She has a vision of herself consumed by fire and emerging "out of ash" to "eat men like air." The rebirth of self is associated not with the mystic's peace and harmony but with violence and murder.

It seems that the emergence of the self as free and independent must be done only by violence, death, murder, and revenge. It is unquestionable that Plath achieves to a degree her spiritual development though she has not yet attained the ultimate Union which fills the mystic with peaceful harmony and blissful happiness. The problem, I believe, is that the poet has not renounced herself altogether. Selflessness, which is the goal of the mystic before the attainment of Reality, is either attempted by the poet or momentarily present in such poems as "Tulip," "Face Lift," "Nick and the Candlestick." In "Purdah," "Daddy," and "Lady Lazarus," the poet reveals that she is still distracted by her personal desire for revenge and prejudices which unfortunately prevent her from achieving the mystic's final goal of unitive life.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

As this thesis has shown, the use of mysticism in analyzing Plath's poems helps defend the poet's vision which is regarded by many critics, especially those who disparage the confessional school, as "sick," "morbid," and "pathological." Plath's spiritual development--her travail through the mystical stages of awakening, purgation, and illumination--links the poet with great mystics of the past. However, the issue which has been left untouched and should be included here is the close connection between mysticism and madness. The clarification of these two psychological experiences alongside our evaluation of the poet's vision will lead toward a better understanding of the poet's spiritual experience.

According to Kenneth Wapnick, William James distinguishes two types of mysticism: higher and lower. The former includes classic mystical experience and the latter James identifies with insanity. James further notes the similarity between these two types of mysticism. Madness and mysticism, as James puts it, are derived from the same root--the "great subliminal or transmarginal region"--and share "[t]he same sense of ineffable importance in the smallest events, the same texts and words coming with new meanings, the same voices and visions and leadings and missions, the same controlling by extraneous powers" (Wapnick 321). Though mysticism is akin to madness in several aspects, there are significant differences between them. Wapnick points out the "ordered movement" of the spiritual development in contrast with the abrupt breakdown of the psychosis. As illustrated by Underhill, the Mystic Way,

namely, awakening, purgation, illumination, dark night of the soul, and unity, involves the soul's progressive journey toward union with the Reality. These stages, during which the mystic experiences the swing back and forth between pleasure and pain, are described by Underhill as the "gymnastics of the soul"--the strengthening process which dramatizes the mystic's integrity, self-discipline, and perseverance. The person who suffers from mental illness, on the other hand, is totally unable to deal with the "sudden onrush of the asocial, personal feeling " (Wapnick 335). Though both the mystic and the psychotic go to the inner world beyond the plummet of the intellect, the mystic brings back the knowledge of fundamental truth in order to deal more effectively with the outside world while the individual who suffers from mental illness visits the "underworld" and remains there. Hence, Wapnick distinguishes the mystic and the schizophrenic: "The mystic provides the example of the method whereby the inner and the outer be joined; the schizophrenic: "The mystic provides the example of the method whereby the inner and the outer be joined; the schizophrenic, the tragic results when they are separated" (337).

Plath poems such as "Tulip," "Face Lift," "Nick and the Candlestick," and "Getting There" reveal the poet's strenuous effort and heroic courage to turn inward, to renounce all kinds of attachment in order to achieve spiritual freedom. The purgation of the self is followed by the moment of illumination--a result of the cleansing of the senses. This illumination is vividly illustrated by such poems as "The Moon and the Yew Tree," "Fever 103," "Wintering" and "Ariel." These poems reveal Plath's spiritual growth which enables her to perceive a higher plane of reality, the achievement of

which, however, requires first the poet's self-annihilation, which is interpreted by many critics as an unhealthy kind of escape, evidence pathological personality.

The connection between the mystic and the divine exemplifies an ideal relationship advocated by feminist critics. In her response to Linda Kauffman's statement, "We have become aware of our construction as gendered subjects, in part because the symbolic order of language identifies us by the definitive opposition man/woman," Elaine Hoffman Baruch says:

Yet the great love literature of the world is one place that we might look for transcendence of gender polarization, for sites of deconstruction before the concept of deconstruction became fashionable. Although the bait of "love" has often been a form of desocialization and disruption of the hierarchically structured binary system of man/ woman. (9)

The "transcendence of gender polarization" corresponds to the dualistic relationship between the mystic and the divine which is resolved into a higher synthesis, the stage described by the mystic as the breaking away from customs and social conventions toward spiritual growth and independence.

Plath's poems illustrate this close relationship between mysticism and gender. Such early poems as "Hardcastle Crag," "Suicide off Egg Rock," "Full Fathom Five," "Lorelei" reveal the poet's experience of nothingness which facilitates the mystical demands for the sacrifice of worldly attachment. In such poems as "The Beekeeper's Daughter," "The Colossus," "The Snowman on the Moor," "Pursuit" and "The Shrike," which illustrate

inequalities in the sexes, the poet's desire for mystical union, however, is met with failure and disappointment.

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